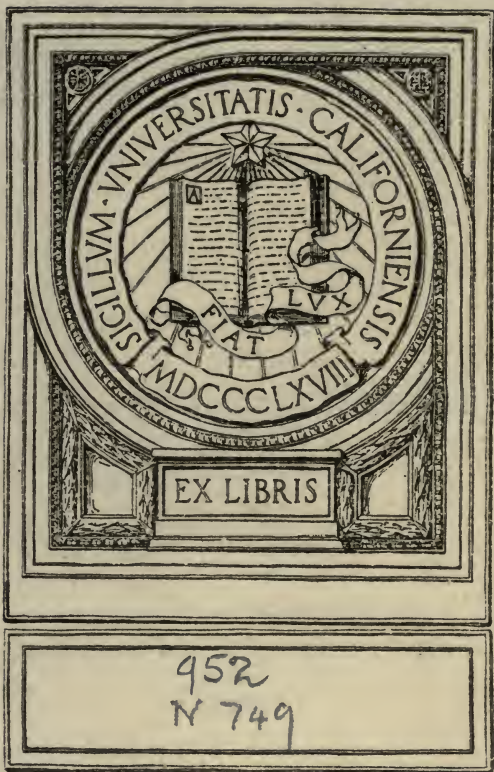


The Sonnet in  
England and  
other Essays

by  
James Ashcroft Noble



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*THE SONNET IN ENGLAND*



THE SONNET  
IN ENGLAND  
& OTHER ESSAYS

by  
J. ASHCROFT NOBLE.



LONDON.  
ELKIN MATHEWS AND JOHN LANE.  
1893

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TO

EDWARD DOWDEN

*Professor of English Literature at the University of Dublin.*

MY DEAR DOWDEN,

During sixteen years of a close and warm friendship—made sacred by two great sorrows, in which we have grieved together—you have put me so largely in your debt by all kinds of cheer, encouragement, and aid, that I have acquired some of the recklessness of the bankrupt debtor; and I am bold enough to beg from you one thing more—your acceptance of the dedication of this little book. I have not asked your consent to such a conjunction of your name and my work; because, had such a petition been made and granted, you might have incurred a certain shadowy responsibility for the faults which, I am sure, are to be found in these essays; and, though your affection might have made you somewhat indifferent to such responsibility, it would ill have become me to burden you with it. As it is, I can do you no injustice and I can give myself a great pleasure by writing and printing words which imply no more than this—that long ago you gave me the right to sign myself—Your friend,

JAMES ASHCROFT NOBLE.



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## PREFACE

THE greater part of the contents of this volume has previously been printed. The first essay appeared in the *Contemporary Review*, the second in *Fraser's Magazine*, the third in the *London Quarterly Review*, the fourth in *Macmillan's Magazine*, and the papers on Robert Stephen Hawker and Mr Robert Buchanan are expansions of articles contributed to a work which, my own share in it being very unimportant, I may praise without indelicacy,—that delightful anthology *The Poets and the Poetry of the Century*, edited so admirably by Mr Alfred H. Miles. To those editors by whose kind permission the six essays are reproduced here, my thanks are heartily rendered, and I cannot feel less grateful to my friendly publishers, who have commended my work to all lovers of books by the pains which they have taken to render it

externally attractive. The reprinted matter has been carefully revised, but I have thought it best to leave unaltered those passages which indicate the date of their production. In the opening essay, for example, Dante Gabriel Rossetti is spoken of as a living poet ; and I retain the reference, not only for the reason given, but because it is a joy to me to know that Rossetti himself received pleasure from the words of one who was then an entirely unknown critic.

JAMES ASHCROFT NOBLE.

*November 26th, 1892.*

## THE SONNET IN ENGLAND

(1880)

MANY students of literature have watched with interest the attempts which have been recently made by some of our younger poets to naturalise in England certain archaic forms of verse which were at one time popular in France, and which have of late years been revived in that country by some of the members of the neo-Romantic school. So far the attempt cannot be said to have met with much success. We have had a few rondels, rondeaux, triolets, villanelles, ballades, and the like, often deftly constructed, and sometimes exhibiting a grace so exquisite that it is on the point of passing into absolute beauty ; but, after all, our English poets do not seem to move freely in these Gallican fetters, and English readers, as a body, have treated the revival with an indifference which does not

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promise well for its longevity. Why this is so cannot be decided hastily ; but it may be considered certain that the frigid reception of the revived forms cannot be attributed either wholly or in large measure to their arbitrary character; for the sonnet, which is as arbitrary as the rondel, and which was, when first imported from Italy, quite as unfamiliar, has become completely naturalised among us, and has been chosen by so many English poets as a favourite form of expression that we have come to look upon it as little more artificial than the so-called heroic verse—the iambic pentameter—which we are accustomed to consider such a typical English vehicle. The history of the sonnet in England would be an interesting subject for a small volume, but as yet no adequate or exhaustive survey of the wide and full-eared field has been attempted ; for the contributions made to sonnet literature by Leigh Hunt, Mr John Dennis, Archbishop Trench, and others, have been confessedly partial and desultory, and in the face of many contributions to poetical criticism which have of late been among the precious gifts of the years, we hope that one of the boons which the near future may have in store for us will be some work written especially for those



who have taken to heart Wordsworth's exhortation, 'Scorn not the sonnet.'

The task of the writer of such a book has of late been much facilitated by the labours of Mr David M. Main, whose *Treasury of English Sonnets* brings, for the first time within the boards of a single volume, a really satisfying collection of as much of our sonnet work as can be considered really representative. The *Treasury* opens with two sonnets from Sir Thomas Wyatt, to whom we owe the acclimatisation of the Italian exotic which has taken so kindly to our insular soil and air, and closes with that sonnet of terrible beauty, instinct with sombre splendour, which Oliver Madox Brown, a boy even more marvellous than Chatterton, prefixed to his weird passionate romance of *The Black Swan*. Between these, we need hardly say, are to be found infinite riches in a little room. Here are the dainty measures of Sir Philip Sidney; the crystals which reflect the clear though cold light of Spenser's passion; the cunningly wrought caskets, rich with varied imagery, in which Shakspeare locked his soul's secret; the grave and majestic harmonies of Milton, that 'God-gifted organ voice of England;' the solemn

thoughted, passionately contemplative records of Wordsworth's retirement to 'the sonnet's scanty plot of ground'; the painted windows of 'warm gules,' rose-bloom, and 'soft amethyst' through which the spirit of Keats throws a coloured radiance; and, most dear and memorable of all those nightingale melodies, those resonant heart-throbs wrought into a divine music, those ecstasies of love and grief and high aspiration, which have been left as an immortal legacy by Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

There are two questions which at once put themselves to any writer upon the subject of the sonnet. First comes the query, What is a sonnet? then the further question, What are the qualities in virtue of which a sonnet takes rank and precedence? In England it was only for a short time that the first question was an easy one to answer. Into the history of the various forms of the Italian sonnet it is not necessary to travel, for we have only to do with that one form which, after many struggles, had become universally recognised as the most perfect. To a true student of sonnet development the notion that a sonnet might be advantageously written in four ordinary elegiac quatrains and a couplet, or in seven couplets, or with any other

arrangement of the rhymes than the two or three which had become established by repeated experiments, would not sound one whit more absurd than the theory that a sonnet might be written in thirteen, or in fifteen, or in any other number of lines ; for if, in a purely arbitrary form the canons of composition sanctioned by an established nomenclature may be violated in one particular, they may be violated in all, and when this violation is accomplished, where is the sonnet ? Our present loose English theory 'in favour of a relaxation . . . . of nearly every law in the Italian code, except the two cardinal ones which demand that the sonnet shall consist of fourteen rhymed decasyllabic verses, and be a development of one idea, mood, feeling, or sentiment,' has the adhesion of Mr Main, from whose Preface I quote ; but it is clear that it has been formulated to fit the facts, for it would naturally be unpleasant to adhere to a canon which would exclude all the sonnets of Shakspeare and a considerable number of very beautiful specimens by later poets. The superiority of the true Italian to the Shakspearian or any other sonnet form in unity, weight, and harmony, will be doubted by hardly any competent critic ; indeed, with the solitary

exception of Ebenezer Elliot, it has not, so far as my knowledge goes, been explicitly questioned by any well-known poet; and Elliot, though he had the genuine *afflatus*, is hardly an authority on a subtle delicacy of art *technique*. [The Italian sonnet is unquestionably a difficult form of verse, and it seems probable that the early English sonneteers were repelled by the difficulties, and ignorant of the splendid successes that might be achieved were those difficulties overcome. Sir Thomas Wyatt's attempts were certainly not calculated to inspire a fervent faith in the possibilities of the new vehicle, and even his fellow-worker, the Earl of Surrey, was quick to find, or to think that he had found, a form more harmonious with the genius of the English language. 'Leigh Hunt,' says Mr Main, 'has pointed out that Spenser, with all his Italian proclivities, was the first who deliberately abandoned the archetypal form of the sonnet,' but, unless we lay special stress upon the word 'deliberately,' even this sentence does not throw the appearance of the irregular English sonnet far enough back. Whether deliberately or not it is impossible to say, but the Italian code *was* violated by the Earl of Surrey, who died five years before the

received date of Spenser's birth, and whose *Songs and Sonnets* were published in 1557, while Spenser's adoption of the form which Surrey had originated dates from the year 1591. The definition of a sonnet which commended itself to the author of the *Faery Queen* was indeed more elastic than that which has been adopted by Mr Main, for at one period he did not even consider rhyme essential, and his earliest poems published under the name of sonnets are accordingly written in blank verse. Finally, he hit upon a novelty in the shape of a sonnet in which the three quatrains are linked together by one common rhyme, and with this form he appeared to be satisfied, as he adopted it in the *Amoretti*, which is undoubtedly his most ambitious series of sonnets. It seems absurd to speak of the sonnet as an established and definable species of verse if we admit the legitimacy of variations like these ; for such an admission leaves nothing of the sonnet but its limitation to fourteen decasyllabic lines, and even this remaining test is rendered meaningless by a neglect of the companion tests, which alone confer upon it validity, and indeed constitute its sole reason of being. The only way to untie a Gordian knot, which must otherwise be reck-

lessly cut, is to allow the name of sonnet to be given without qualification only to those constructed on the Italian model; other fourteen-line poems being set apart by a distinguishing prefix, such as illegitimate, irregular, or Shakspearian.

The second question, concerning the qualities which give to a sonnet its special value, is one which any thoughtful writer, aware of the differences of opinion which have prevailed among eminent critics, will answer with modesty and hesitation. As one illustration of a curious divergence of taste and feeling, I have noticed lately that while one writer of fine critical genius declares that 'a true sonnet should rise into a climax in the last two lines, should kindle into flame as it expires,' another deservedly honoured authority numbers among the conspicuous beauties of Wordsworth's sonnets the fact that 'there is hardly one . . . which ends in a point. At the close of the sonnet, where the adventitious effect of the point might be apt to outshine the intrinsic value of the subject, it seems to have been studiously avoided. Mr Wordsworth's sonnet never goes off, as it were, with a clap or repercussion at the close, but is thrown off like a rocket, breaks into light, and

falls in a soft shower of brightness.' That such a difference upon a mere matter of sonnet composition should be possible, seems an indication that the sonnet has never received the amount of study which it deserves, and we are prepared to find that, with regard to the essential qualities of this verse-form, opinions are still more divided and equally irreconcilable. As a matter of fact this is really the case. Frequently, in Mr Main's notes, we encounter verdicts of well-known critics, assigning to certain sonnets or groups of sonnets a supremacy the notes of which are anything but easy to discover ; and we are driven to the conclusion that a great deal of sonnet criticism resembles the criticism of artistically uneducated visitors to picture galleries, who, after confessing that they are quite ignorant of painting, and only know what they like, do not hesitate to commit themselves to the most uncompromising and unguarded estimates. Without doubt the first fact to be remembered in formulating canons of sonnet criticism is that a sonnet is a *poem*, and that, whatsoever it lacks, it must at any rate possess the qualities without which no poem can be admirable. The presentation of the motive, whether intellectual or emotional, must be adequate ; its treatment must be im-

√ aginative; and the language in which it is embodied must be entirely transparent and musical—chosen with such unerring instinct as to leave the impression that there can have been no choice, that every word has an inevitableness which forbids the supposition that any other might have taken its place. But a good sonnet must be something more than fourteen lines of good poetry: it must fulfil its peculiar conditions of being, both structural and vital. Of the former we have already spoken; the latter it is a more difficult task to specify without falling into commonplace, or drifting into what bears the semblance of dogmatism. (The one thing most needful in the sonnet is what may be called  
√ impressive unity.) I do not, with Mr Main, think it absolutely essential that it should be an utterance of one thought or one emotion, for within its bounds one thought may be opposed by another, and one emotion set against its opposite; but it is essential that the impression  
√ left by the sonnet as a whole shall be thoroughly homogeneous—that as it approaches its close the varying threads, if there have been such, should be twined together, and that the reader should be made to feel that the whole commends, amalgamates, and glorifies all the parts—that every

part is, indeed, but a member of a vital organism. Take as an illustration a sonnet of Wordsworth's unequalled among his many sonnets for tender beauty; though surpassed by a few in insistent power and mastering splendour:—

'It is a beauteous evening, calm and free; <sup>a</sup>  
The holy time is quiet as a nun <sup>b</sup>  
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun <sup>f</sup>  
Is sinking down in its tranquillity; <sup>a</sup>  
The gentleness of heaven is on the sea: <sup>a</sup>  
Listen! the mighty Being is awake, <sup>a</sup>  
And doth with his eternal motion make <sup>c</sup>  
A sound like thunder—everlastingly. <sup>a</sup>  
Dear child, dear girl! that walketh with me here, <sup>d</sup>  
If thou appear untouched by solemn thought, <sup>e</sup>  
Thy nature is not therefore less divine: <sup>f</sup>  
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year, <sup>d</sup>  
And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine, <sup>f</sup>  
God being with thee when we know it not.' <sup>e</sup>

Now, there can be no doubt that this sonnet has that impressive unity which, as has been said, the form pre-eminently demands; but it is the unity which comes not of the expression of one mood, but of the discovery of a spiritual ground common to two moods which seem diverse and, at first sight, even inconsistent—the emotion roused in the mind of the philosophical poet by the beating against his heart of the great heart of Nature, and the apparent

apathy of the young girl who steps beside him, seemingly untouched by solemn thought. True, at the beginning of the sestet the continuity of thought appears to be broken, but we are only led off along a returning curve, and when we reach the close we compass for the first time the outline of the inspiring conception which informs every line of this perfect poem.

This sonnet cannot fail to remind us of the question to which two opposing answers have been quoted, as to whether in this form of composition it is or is not desirable that we should be led on to a point or climax. Most readers, whether critical or uncritical, will agree with the first of the two verdicts—that the sonnet, like the plant which blooms in our gardens, should vindicate its right to be by the bright consummate flower which comes as the fulfilment of its promise, the culmination of its life. It is impossible, however, to lay down rules as to whether it is better that the wave of poetic emotion should gently lap or tempestuously break upon its shore ; whether the sound left lingering in our ears by high poetry should be a shrill trumpet-blast or a dying fall of harp-like melody ; for the winds of the spirit blow as

they list, and Art, like Wisdom, is justified of her children. Still, one thing at least may be said without pedantic dogmatism—that the sonnet should, as it proceeds, gain strength and momentum instead of losing them; that its latest lines should, in sense, in sound, or in both, reach a nobler altitude than its earlier ones; and that it should leave with us a sense of victorious accomplishment, not of vague dissatisfaction. This may sometimes be achieved without anything that can with truth be called a climax: it is so achieved in Milton's great sonnet *On the late Massacres in Piedmont*; but even there the poet's instinct compels him to conclude with a line so weighty and sonorous that it reminds us of an avalanche thundering down the side of one of his 'Alpine mountains cold.' Exaggerated straining after point and climax is bad, but so is similar straining after any kind of artistic effect; and if Wordsworth did, as his critic says he did, studiously avoid to avail himself of one of the most legitimate means of stamping on a reader's mind a sharp and permanent impression of the thought or mood he was moved to utter, he was guilty of an offence equally reprehensible; he was a Philistine binding only too effectually the

Samson of song in the green withs of scholastic theory.

The division of the sonnet into two unequal parts, a division which our best sonnet-writers have shown an increasing disposition to maintain, is, in itself, an indication of the true mode of treatment. The first eight lines, technically the octave, seem as if they might be intended for a broad exposition of the motive ; the last six, the sestet, for a special application of it. Here is a sonnet of Mr Matthew Arnold's exemplifying this method of handling :—

#### WORLDLY PLACE

*' Even in a palace, life may be led well !*

So spoke the imperial sage, purest of men,  
 Marcus Aurelius.—But the stifling den  
 Of common life, where, crowded up pell-mell,  
 Our freedom for a little bread we sell,  
 And drudge under some foolish master's ken,  
 Who rates us if we peer outside our pen—  
 Matched with a palace, is not this a hell ?

*Even in a palace !* On his truth sincere  
 Who spake these words, no shadow ever came ;  
 And when my ill-schooled spirit is aflame  
 Some nobler, ampler stage of life to win,  
 I'll stop and say : " There were no succour here !  
 The aids to noble life are all within."

In this sonnet a general statement of great ethical facts of life is followed by a personal

appropriation which brings them home. In another, by the same poet, the process is reversed ; it begins with the individual instance and passes from it to the universal lesson. The thought is a fine one, and the treatment singularly beautiful and satisfying.

## EAST LONDON

‘Twas August, and the fierce sun overhead  
Smote on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green,  
And the pale weaver, through his window seen  
In Spitalfields, looked thrice dissipated ;  
I met a preacher there I knew, and said :  
“ Ill and o’er-worked, how fare you in this scene ? ”  
“ Bravely ! ” said he, “ for I of late have been  
Much cheered with thoughts of Christ, *the living bread.*”  
O human soul ! so long as thou canst so  
Set up a mark of everlasting light  
Above the howling senses’ ebb and flow,  
To cheer thee and to right thee if thou roam,  
Not with lost toil thou labourest through the night !  
Thou mak’st the heaven thou hop’st indeed thy home.’

In numerous instances, however, even where the formal division is retained, there is no such perceptible break or turn as in any of the sonnets I have quoted. The theme of the octave may be prolonged through the sestet, but there will be a subtle difference of treatment. It will be carried on in a slightly changed key, or in slower or quicker time ; and in most sonnets

of the highest class the sestet will probably be either a completion, concentration, or gathering together of the subject matter of the octave, or a return upon it for some new and untried point of approach, thus giving to a familiar thought or fancy the magnetic charm of which we thought accustomed wont and use had for ever deprived it. Nor is it probable that there will ever be a total failure of writers who will treat the sonnet as a simple unity, the two parts melting into one another and ceasing to be separately distinguishable, as they do in the supreme achievement of Milton, and in some of the most perfect and unapproachable efforts of Mrs Browning and Mr Rossetti, such as *Substitution* and the sonnet *For a Venetian Pastoral*. For evermore in matters like these the mighty masters will be a law unto themselves, and the validity of their legislation will be attested and held against all comers by the splendour of an unchallengeable success.

Perhaps all has been said that needs to be said concerning the peculiar qualities of the sonnet ; for, as I have said, many of its requirements are only what would be the requirements of any brief poem charged with the adequate treatment of a single theme. (It must have an imaginative completeness which leaves us serenely satisfied ;

it must have an artistic perfectness which shall stand the test of that frequent and loving examination to which, in virtue of its very brevity, it makes a claim ; it must have its every line strong, its every word harmonious : it must be concentrated yet clear, compact yet fluent ; and while every phrase and image is in itself a joy-giving thing of beauty, every member must remain in sweet subordination to the total effect and impression of the whole.

One might almost assume without examination that even among the thousands of English sonnets there would be found comparatively few which fulfil all the conditions of so elaborate and exigent a form of verse. The text of Mr Main's *Treasury* contains 463 sonnets, chosen with true discrimination, and representing the highest achievement of every English sonneteer who had passed away before the close of the year 1879 ; but it would not be maintained by any critic, or even by the compiler himself, that more than a very small proportion of these can be classed among the flawless pearls of poetry. It may be doubted whether there are more than fifty of them which, if judged as sonnets, and not merely as fourteen-line poems, can be praised without implicit limitations and reserves. No amiable

person will be inclined to think harshly of editorial enthusiasm, or to blame severely the critic who believes he has rescued from oblivion the work of an undeservedly neglected genius ; but, as a rule, ultimate fame is fairly proportioned to desert, and if a writer has been forgotten, the presumption is, that whatever be the merits or beauties of his work, its loss of hold upon the memory of mankind is but one example of the operation of the law of the survival of the fittest. (Sir Thomas Wyatt's sonnets were of the true Italian type, and occasionally, as in the sonnet—

‘Divers doth use, as I have heard and know,’

he attains that charm, a compound of ingenuity and grace, in which few cultured writers of his day were deficient. But this is all ; there is a total lack of positive virtue, of quality, of distinction ; nor in passing from his work to that of his compeer, the Earl of Surrey, do we make any change for the better, but remain in the ✓ same atmosphere of respectable commonplace. Indeed, among the courtly versifiers of the period—the mob of gentlemen who wrote with dignity rather than with ease—we only find one, Sir Philip Sidney, whose sonnet work rises

above this dead level, and though Charles Lamb can hardly be acquitted of loving exaggeration when he says that the best of Sidney's sonnets 'are among the best of their sort,' they are certainly a refreshing oasis in a desert where nothing grew but sterile flowers of strained sentiment, fantastic phrase, and far-fetched imagery. Not that Sidney is free from the conceits of his age; his verse is, as Lamb says, 'stuck full of amorous fancies,' which the genial essayist celebrates affectionately on the ground that 'True Love thinks no labour to send out thoughts upon the vast and more than Indian voyages, to bring home rich pearls, outlandish wealth, gems, jewels, spicery, to sacrifice in self-depreciating similitudes as shadows of true amiabilities in the Beloved.' Sidney's conceits, however, are humanised; they glow instead of merely sparkling, and we do not simply see the versifier in them, but feel the gentle, tender, chivalrous humanity behind them. Now and then he abandons them altogether, and his thought and language acquire the sweet naturalness and spontaneity which were the dower of both an earlier and a later age, but which in his time were for the court poets lost gifts, as in the following sonnet, which it seems strange should

not have found a place among the other jewels embedded in the setting of Elia's golden eulogy. Perhaps it looked too much like an English pebble to consort well with the spoils of those 'more than Indian voyages.'

' Because I breathe not love to every one,  
Nor do not use set colours for to wear,  
Nor nourish special locks of vowèd hair,  
Nor give each speech the full point of a groan,  
The courtly nymphs, acquainted with the moan  
Of them who in their lips Love's standard bear,—  
"What he!" say they of me; "now I dare swear  
He cannot love. No, no, let him alone."  
And think so still, if Stella know my mind!  
Profess indeed I do not Cupid's art;  
But you, fair maids, at length this true shall find  
That this right badge is but worn in the heart:  
Dumb swans, not chattering pies, do lovers prove:  
They love indeed who quake to say they love.'

Another reason for the exclusion of this sonnet from Lamb's selected twelve may be found in its occasional lapses from perfect expressional grace, several of the lines being, to say the least, susceptible of improvement either in transparency or music; but if we are to deal severely with fine points like these, there are few sonnets of the period that can escape a whipping, and, the last line betrays a penetration into the true mysteries of love which,

if more general among Sidney's contemporaries, would have slain before birth many of their 'vain amatorious poems,' which confer honour upon love, and add value to literature in an equally infinitesimal degree. Still, it must be admitted that the sonnet quoted is in workmanship inferior to at least three of Lamb's twelve—notably to that exquisitely beautiful invocation to Sleep, the felicity and grace, of which might win the suffrages of many a harsher critic than the gentle Elia.

Spenser is one of our greatest poets, but he is far from being a great sonneteer, and of his sonnet-like poems Mr Main utters the opinion of most readers when he calls them disappointing. They are deficient in body, frigid in tone, and altogether wanting in the graces of manner we might naturally expect from the author of the *Faery Queen*. Among them all there is only one which leaves on the mind any sharp impression, and that one has certainly a dignified movement and tender chastity of diction which make it worthy of its high parentage. We may not all admit the perfect appropriateness of Lord Macaulay's characterisation of Milton's 'Avenge, O Lord' as 'a collect in verse,' but this sonnet of Spenser's has really a very ap-

preciable affinity to the style of the collects—those unique jewels of devout aspiration.

‘Most glorious Lord of Life ! that on this day  
Did’st make thy triumph over death and sin,  
And having harrowed hell did’st bring away  
Captivity thence captive, us to win :  
This joyous day, dear Lord, with joy begin ;  
And grant that we, for whom Thou diddest die,  
Being with thy dear blood washed clean from sin  
May live for ever in felicity !  
And that thy love we weighing worthily  
May likewise love Thee for the same again;  
And for thy sake, that all like dear didst buy,  
With love may one another entertain.  
So let us love, dear love, like as we ought :  
Love is the lesson which the Lord us taught.’

As a poet in the broadest sense of the word, Drummond of Hawthornden ranks far below Spenser ; but in the ‘sonnet’s scanty plot’ he rules as of right divine, and even the lord of the world of faery must stand uncovered before him. There is not the same weight of matter in his sonnets that there is in the irregular sonnets of Shakspeare, nor is there the same penetrative vigour of language ; but there are qualities equally precious if not equally impressive—exquisite keenness of sensibility, attested by peculiar delicacy of touch ; imaginative vision and notable power of rendering it ; native

spontaneousness happily allied with fine mastery of the secrets of metre and melody ; and the rare art—carried to perfection in the sonnets of Mr Rossetti—of making his verse the expression, not of crude passion, which, as Edgar Poe pointed out, is not genuine poetic material, but rather the reflection of passion in the still deeps of imaginative reverie. In Drummond's sonnet work, we certainly miss one characteristic which is almost a constant note of high genius, the magnificent recklessness which takes no thought of finite limitations, but boldly essays the impossible. He knew what he could do and what he could not do, and the outcome of this knowledge is a pervading equality of craftsmanship. Though almost all his sonnets are beautiful, there is not one of such overmastering beauty that it storms the citadel of the soul and takes the memory captive. We feel, and cannot help feeling, that when Drummond had exhausted his expressional possibilities, he had still a store of the raw material of poetry which remained unworked and unworkable, and he therefore remains for ever what Dr George MacDonald, with fine insight, calls him—'a *voix voilée*, or veiled voice of song.'

In a brief study it were vain to attempt

speech of the minor singers of that vocal age: of Sir Walter Raleigh, George Chapman, Robert Greene, Michael Drayton, John Donne, William Browne, and other less known poets; and if the truth must be told, there is — despite the rhapsodising eulogies of a few critics—little in their contributions to sonnet literature to repay the study of anyone but an editor or a specialist. Indeed some of the verdicts passed upon their performances even by men of real eminence, seem of use only as proofs of the dulling effect upon the finer sensibilities of long poring over essentially second-rate work. No one who has any feeling for the truly poetic in poetry can refrain from a sardonic smile when he finds one of these critics speaking of a far-fetched, extravagant, and utterly unimpressive conceit of Sir Walter Raleigh's, entitled *A Vision upon the Faery Queene*, as 'alone sufficient to place Raleigh in the rank of those few original writers who can introduce and perpetuate a new type in a literature.' If the false and frigid rhetoric of this *Vision* be the note of the new type, we certainly prefer the old; but the very badness of this sonnet seems to have fascinated its critics and made them feel that it stood in all the more need of praise. Even Mr Main, who is as a

rule singularly free from extravagance, actually quotes, apparently with approval, the remark of Dr Hannah that it has received the tribute of the imitation of Milton in his sonnet on his deceased wife. Both poems certainly begin with the word 'Methought,' and both mention a tomb — 'there is a river in Macedon and there is a river in Monmouth';—but that is absolutely all, and this being so, it is hardly likely that Milton's 'tribute' can add much to Raleigh's fame.

We have said that the sonnet writers of the Shakspearian age have left little really memorable work, but that little may fairly claim a recognition of its virtues. The one grain of wheat in the bushel of chaff is wheat still, and in this chaff-heap there are more grains than one, though they undoubtedly need some seeking for. One of them is an irregular sonnet of Michael Drayton's, to which Mr Henry Reed in his 'Lectures on the English Poets' does no more than justice when he says, 'From Anacreon down to Moore I know no lines on the old subject of lovers' quarrels distinguished for equal tenderness of sentiment'; though when he adds 'and richness of fancy,' we confess that we are not able to follow him. The octave is, as will be seen, entirely unadorned, and the single

metaphor in the sestet is a little marred by the double personification of Love and Passion, which is rather confusing, and which might easily have been avoided. Of fancy, however, we have enough and to spare in the poetry of that period ; the charm of this sonnet lies in its perfect simplicity, in its singular directness, in its unforced pathos, in that adequacy of treatment which makes us feel that what had to be said is said in the best possible way.

‘ Since there’s no help, come let us kiss and part—  
Nay, I have done, you get no more of me ;  
And I am glad, yea glad with all my heart,  
That thus so cleanly I myself can free ;  
Shake hands for ever, cancel all our vows,  
And when we meet at any time again,  
Be it not seen in either of our brows  
That we one jot of former love retain.  
Now at the last gasp of Love’s latest breath,  
When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies,  
When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death  
And Innocence is closing up his eyes—  
Now if thou would’st, when all have given him over,  
From death to life thou might’st him yet recover.’

Another of the wheat-grains is a true sonnet by John Donne on that one subject which, with the single exception of Love, has been the most favoured motive of lyrical poets, and which for the singers of our own dreamful day, seems

possessed of a peculiar fascination. It is to be doubted whether the English language has any invocation to Death which, for manliness, weight, and dignity, deserves a place beside this high utterance of the first of our miscalled 'metaphysical poets.'

'Death, be not proud, though some have callèd thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so ;  
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow  
Die not, poor death ; nor yet canst thou kill me.  
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,  
Much pleasure : then from thee much more must flow  
And soonest our best men with thee do go—  
Rest of their bones, and souls' delivery.  
Thou'rt slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,  
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell ;  
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well,  
And better than thy stroke. Why swell'st thou then ?  
One short sleep past we wake eternally  
And Death shall be no more : Death, thou shalt die.'

I know of nothing of the same kind in English poetry more impressive than this solemnly triumphant close; and the only parallel which occurs at the moment is the magnificent conclusion of Mr Swinburne's perfect lyric, *A Forsaken Garden*.

'Here now in his triumph where all things falter,  
Stretched out on the spoils that his own hand spread,  
As a god self-slain on his own strange altar,  
Death lies dead.'

The remarkable, and in many respects pre-eminent, series of fourteen-line poems known as the sonnets of Shakspeare, present a dilemma on one horn of which the writer of a short essay must be impaled. They fill such a space and hold such a rank in the sonnet literature of England, that to ignore them is impossible, and to treat them adequately is not one whit less so. Numberless volumes, the outcome of long and loving study, have been devoted to a theme which I must needs dismiss in a few brief and necessarily unsatisfactory sentences. True, most of these volumes have been occupied with matters which are irrelevant to our main purpose. Wordsworth, whose briefest criticisms are generally full of insight, surely erred when he said that in these poems Shakspeare unlocked his heart, for the precious collection is still, like the book in the Apocalypse, 'sealed with seven seals.' We know by whom the poems were written, but we can hardly say without uncertainty that we know to whom they were addressed ; and with regard to their true significance, speculation has followed speculation, and theory has set itself against theory. Perhaps it is impossible to repress the desire to penetrate those occult mysteries of literature of which the

Shakspeare sonnet problem is among the most fascinating; but it is certainly unfortunate that perplexing questions concerning the genesis and final cause of these poems should so largely have diverted attention from those positive qualities which give them their main value and interest.

The first of these qualities—or rather that quality in which all others are included—is what must be called, for want of another word, their pervading Shakspearianism. We smile at the ‘Correggiosity of Correggio,’ and we may smile at the Shakspearianism of Shakspeare; but, after all, how can the bringer-in of a unique type be defined in the terms of an established nomenclature? Shakspeare has this and that quality which belonged to his predecessors—the insight of one, the imagination of another, the expressional felicity of a third; but he unites them all in a new synthesis, and for the product of this synthesis we are bound to make a new definition. Until Shakspeare has a compeer he is a class by himself, and as the world seems to have decided that the compeer has not yet arrived, he remains above all else Shakspearian. And in his poems, notably in these so-called sonnets, which are the richest and completest of them, this unique personal note is as clearly discernible as in the

noblest of the plays, and much more discernible than in some of those earlier dramatic efforts which mark the tentative stage of his development. If we could imagine the existence of a person of cultivated taste who was still ignorant of the recognised place of Shakspeare in literature, he could not pass from the sonnet work of Shakspeare's contemporaries to that of the master himself without an instant sense of an enlarged outlook, of a freer, clearer air, of a more impressive spiritual presence. There is the recognition of an unmistakable amplitude of treatment, a large utterance, and ensuing upon this a feeling of fellowship with a soul wealthy enough to disdain the smaller economies of the intellect. In these sonnets there is no sense of strain ; we do not feel, as in reading Drummond, that the poet has touched his possibilities, but that even in his farthest reaches they are still long ahead of him. Even when the intellectual level attained by an author is not absolutely high, as it is here, there is always a felt charm in his work if it leave such an impression as this ; a charm like that which belongs to the feats of some trained athlete who performs what seem muscular miracles with the graceful ease of effortless strength.

Coleridge has spoken of the 'condensation of thought' in these sonnets, Dyce of their 'profound thought,' Archbishop Trench of their being 'double-shotted with thought'; but, if I mistake not, the thing which gives to them their specific gravity is not what is usually understood by thought, but what may rather be described as intellectualised emotion—that is / the incarnation of pure emotion, (which is itself too rare and attenuated an essence to be adequately and at the same time sustainedly expressed), in a body of symbol or situation which is supplied by the intellect. The simple poring out of passion is apt to become tiresome to all save the lover and the beloved; but in reading Shakspeare's sonnets we are sensible of no loss of gusto; the last is as piquant as the first; and this because the mere passion, which is in itself an ordinary thing,—though the passion of a Titan must needs be Titanesque,—is supplemented by the tremendous intellectual force which lies behind and beneath it, and bears it up as the foam-bell is borne on the bosom of the great sea.

The connoisseur in these delicacies of verse loses little by passing *per saltum* from Shakspeare to Milton, whose sonnets as unmistakably

as his epics bear the impress of the modelling of a Michael Angelo of literature. Dr Johnson and Hannah More, after quietly assuming that Milton's sonnets were very bad, set out upon an investigation into the causes of their badness; and it was in the course of this edifying and fruitful inquiry that Johnson distinguished himself by his description of Milton's genius as one 'that could hew a Colossus out of a rock, but could not carve heads on cherry-stones.' This curious remark has often been quoted in proof of Dr Johnson's absolute insensitiveness to the appeal of essential poetry, and it does undoubtedly prove this very conclusively; but it has not, we think, been noticed that it betrays an equally absolute ignorance of the true character of the sonnet. Critics have been more careful to maintain Milton's ability to carve heads upon cherry-stones than to inquire whether cherry-stone carving and sonnet writing have any real artistic affinity. A head upon a cherry-stone is at best an ingenious trifle, which can but show the dexterity of its artificer; a sonnet is of the nature of a cameo, which is either a satisfying work of art or nothing. The pre-Miltonic sonnet had certainly been  
✓ largely devoted to the elaboration of amor-

ous fantasies: Milton, as Landor gracefully said—

‘Caught the sonnet from the dainty hand  
Of Love, who cried to lose it, and he gave  
The notes to glory;—’

but thus to apotheosise any literary form is the surest evidence of supreme mastery of its conditions and possibilities. It would not be too much to say that every sonnet from Milton's hand betrays this mastery as fully as the O of Giotto. They are unequal in conception; some are the utterances of a more and some of a less happy mood; but ‘the spirit of the handling’ is the same in all. We perceive everywhere the splendid sweep of a soul which revolves through vast circumferences around a fixed centre, with its centripetal and centrifugal forces in impressive equipoise; and the emotion born and maintained within us is that which would be roused by the swimming into our ken of a new planet, moving through the stellar spaces as through the halls of an ancestral home.

Even when Milton's matter repels or fails to interest, there is always something in his manner which compels an attentive and fascinated hear-

ing. The personal quality, which was of pure and high self-containedness all compact, informs the language and gives it a magical power. He on his mountain-top had learned from the silent stars and voiceful winds a speech which was not the dialect of the crowd, and, whatever be the burden of the saying, there is a spell in the mere intonation. We feel the spell sometimes almost humorously, as in the rough-hewn sonnet with its harsh, unpoetic, bald, monosyllabic rhymes—‘clogs,’ ‘dogs,’ ‘frogs,’ ‘hogs,’—which leaves almost the same sense of weight and mass that we derive from his nobler and more delightful utterances. Among these, it is needless to say, one stands apart in unapproached and unapproachable majesty. The great sonnet *On the late Massacres in Piedmont* is one of those achievements in which matter of the noblest order moulds for itself a form of the highest excellence, matter and form being, as in music and in all supreme art, so bound up and interfused that, though we know both of them to be there, we cannot know them or think of them apart. Much has been said in eulogy of this sonnet, and said worthily and well; but there is a perfection which mocks praise, and it is this perfection that is here attained; not the perfec-

tion which consists in this quality or in that, but which comes when all qualities which may be displayed, all potentialities which can be exerted, meet in triumphant, satisfying, utter accomplishment. When Lord Macaulay called it a collect in verse he was on the right track, for such comparisons are more expressive and less misleading than the more definite characterisations of criticism; but it would have been safer to compare it to some great work of nature, or even to some equally moving product of pictorial, or plastic, or musical art, than to any other work of literary craftsmanship, howsoever perfect. To undervalue the collects would simply be to show a total want of feeling for exquisiteness of form; but the peculiar quality of their indwelling virtue has a subtle but quite apprehensible difference from the something which makes Milton's sonnet just what it is. The collects have grace, pliancy, symmetry, and compactness; they have both stately phrase and tender cadence, and they are impregnated with an undying aroma of devotion; but they have not, and it would not be fitting that they should have, the splendid and sonorous rhetoric, the solemn majesty as of a judge pronouncing doom, the white heat of prophetic passion, which give

its unique character to this invocation of divine vengeance.

Of Milton's other sonnets, 'soul-animating strains, alas too few,' nothing more need be said here. In the great utterance of which we have been discoursing all their varied virtues are gathered up and concentrated. What is true of it is true in less measure of its companions, and they are worthy of grateful study, not merely for their absolute perfections, but because they are the first successful attempts to vindicate on a large scale the possibilities of the true sonnet. The mighty intellectual and ethical force of which all Milton's work is the manifestation cannot blind us to the supremacy of his purely æsthetic instincts. Whatever else he might remember, he never forgot that he was an artist, and in several of these sonnets his art achieves some of its finest triumphs. Even in those which are, comparatively speaking, of minor importance and interest, there is a restful adequacy, a satisfying fulfilment, which all sonnet-writers must necessarily strive after, but which very few attain; and, in addition to this inestimable quality of the sonnets as poetic wholes, there is not one without some line or lines which, for elevation of thought or magnificence

of music, impress us at once with an ever-enduring sense of final mastery.

Between the age of Milton and the age of Wordsworth the sonnet literature of England is but a desert, with spots rather than patches of poetic verdure. Even in Mr Main's *Treasury*, which errs, if at all, on the side of undue copiousness, the whole period is represented by only twenty-one specimens, selected from thirteen poets, and of the best of these it can only be said in the words of Dr Johnson that they are 'not bad.' It is curious, however, to note that in the fetters of an artificial form the singers of an essentially artificial age lose much of their artificiality, and though we do not altogether escape from conventional epithets and hackneyed allusions, we find a grateful freshness and freedom which are missing in most of the poetry of the time. Perhaps one of the most interesting, though one of the least familiar of these growths of an ungenial soil, is the work of one who gained distinction by his prose rather than his verse. William Roscoe, the biographer of Lorenzo de' Medici, having met with business misfortunes, found himself compelled to bring his property to the hammer. Even his beloved books had to go, and from

these he could not part without a heart-pang, which found expression in this touching sonnet :—

‘ As one who, destined from his friends to part,  
Regrets his loss, yet hopes again erewhile  
To share their converse and enjoy their smile,  
And tempers as he may affliction’s dart—  
Thus, loved associates ! chiefs of elder Art !  
Teachers of Wisdom ! who could once beguile  
My tedious hours, and lighten every toil,  
I now resign you ; nor with fainting heart ;  
For pass a few short years, or days, or hours,  
And happier seasons may their dawn unfold,  
And all your sacred fellowship restore ;  
When, freed from earth, unlimited its powers,  
Mind shall with mind direct communion hold,  
And kindred spirits meet to part no more.’

One or two of Cowper’s sonnets, particularly that addressed to Mrs Unwin, which begins with the line—

‘ Mary ! I want a lyre with other strings,’

are worthy of remembrance. The single sonnet of Gray hardly deserved the savage treatment by which Wordsworth has immortalised it ; and the sonnet work of William Lisle Bowles has a certain literary interest on account of the influence—a somewhat inexplicable one, it must be owned—which it exercised in the formation

of the poetic taste of Coleridge ; but, on the whole, the prospect hereabouts is hardly a cheerful one. In the study of the sonnets of Wordsworth we feel at once that we are ascending to a new altitude, and gazing round on an ampler horizon. If we take into consideration both quality and mass of work, we may well agree with Mr John Dennis that Wordsworth is 'perhaps the greatest of English sonnet writers.' Milton, indeed, reached a height which Wordsworth never gained ; but, while the one takes us to a lofty and solitary peak where we can never fail to be conscious of the distance of the vale beneath, the other leads us to an elevated table-land of such expanse, that we can wander at will, and in our wanderings forget that there is a lower world. Milton, to change the figure, overshadows us : we do not lose our personality, but feel his rising before us, and shutting out all besides. Wordsworth, on the contrary, unless our mood be unalterably alien to his own, possesses us, pervades us, transfuses his spirit into our spirits, and makes us feel with him. He does this in virtue of his strong humanity, his abiding sympathy with what the author of *Ecce Homo* calls 'the man in men,' this being, as I take it, the living aggregate of those

thoughts and passions which are distinctive of men in whom the moral development has been consentaneous with the emotional and intellectual growth. Wordsworth moves us by the sheer directness of his ethical and imaginative insight ; and the craftsmanship of his sonnet-work is noteworthy, for the most part, only as a means of making this directness thoroughly impressive. Few poets so great as Wordsworth have been so deficient in what Goethe called the dæmonic element, the incalculable force which touches and sways us, we know not why or how. Wordsworth's effects are all explicable and calculable ; we see 'the hidden pulse of the machine': he is, save in one or two memorable instances, wanting in what has been called natural magic ; and the existence of this very deficiency makes the charm and power of his work all the more remarkable. Now and then, in the sonnets, he catches a splendour beyond the reach of art, as in the concluding lines of the sonnet *Composed on Westminster Bridge* :—

'Dear God ! the very houses seem asleep  
And all that mighty heart is lying still ;'—

✓ but, as a rule, (we are struck by the collectedness

of the poet; by the fact that he is the master of his conceptions, not their servant, saying to this 'Go,' and it goeth, and to another 'Stay,' and it stayeth. And yet he was throughout guided by a sure instinct. He felt, if we may so put it, the responsibilities of the sonnet; and, in spite of his imperfect theory of poetic language, which so often led him astray, the style of the sonnets, though sometimes austere, is hardly ever bald. Nor do we find here any trace of Wordsworth's other besetting sin, the sin of diffuseness and limp expatiation. The poet whose work is self-conscious, who writes what he will rather than what he must, will always feel, as Wordsworth felt, 'the weight of too much liberty,' and the fetters of an arbitrary form like the sonnet seem less like fetters than supports and wholesome restraints. In the sonnets Wordsworth's style is at its finest: it is nervous, sinewy, compact, and yet always clear and fluent. His natural language had a note of simple dignity, but its naturalness was not always preserved; for the simplicity sometimes sank into puerility and the dignity deteriorated into bombast. In the sonnets, however, these lapses are almost non-existent. They are not dithyrambic, but they are always gravely eloquent, striking at the

opening a clear resonant key-note of lofty emotion which is nobly sustained until the close. A score of the best known—and in Wordsworth's case the best known are the best—of the sonnets would be a collection of verse the companionable value of which would be in its way unsurpassed. Such poetic treasures as 'The world is too much with us,' 'Earth hath not anything to show more fair,' 'Great men have been among us,' 'Milton, thou should'st be living at this hour,' and a dozen others which linger in the memory, have a tonic and invigorating quality which it is difficult to overestimate. Critics of the Rydal poet have been wont to divide readers into Wordsworthians and non-Wordsworthians; but in the presence of these utterances, whose grace is a grace of perfected strength, these distinctions fade away. A refusal of homage would not merely stamp a man as a non-Wordsworthian, but as one for whom the highest poetical motives and the most exquisite forms have no preciousness, to whom they make no appeal. Concerning the entire body of Wordsworth's work there will always be wide differences of opinion founded on inherent and ineradicable differences of taste; but upon the greatest of these sonnets only one

verdict is possible—that they are an addition of inestimable value to the world's accumulated store of imaginative wealth.

The true signs of the poetic nature were perhaps more clearly discernible in Coleridge than in his great compeer; but as a sonneteer he was certainly Wordsworth's inferior. His sonnets seem to us altogether wanting in distinction and charm, with the further disadvantage of being occasionally marred by the intrusion of a quality for which, in Coleridge's time, the name 'spasmodic' had not been invented. Poor Hartley Coleridge, who promised so much and performed so little, produced many sonnets, and is, as a sonnet-writer, as far in front of his father as he is behind his father's friend. The beautiful sonnet beginning—

‘What was’t awakened first the untried ear  
Of that sole man who was all human kind?’

would have been more content-giving if the interrogatory form had been dropped before the close; but many of his sonnets have indubitable quality, and one or two of them—such, for example, as ‘If I have sinned in act I may repent,’ and ‘Let me not dream that I was made in vain’—betray a combined vigour and subtlety

which makes us feel that great possibilities were extinguished by the blight which withered the singer's mournfully ineffectual career. Concerning a host of Wordsworthian sonnets, of which Sir Aubrey de Vere was the earliest and the Rev. Charles Tennyson Turner the latest producer, nothing needs to be said but that they have everything of Wordsworth save the informing power which made his sonnets so monumental and memorable. Wordsworth's work is easily imitable by congenial spirits, and these imitations—probably for the most part unconscious reproductions of the master's manner—are by no means unworthy; but they have no place in the history of art. The latter of the two poets just mentioned did, however, produce one sonnet of singular beauty, a sonnet not in the least like Wordsworth, but with a strong suggestion of George Herbert; and it seems to me to be in its own way so perfect and delightful, that I break the order of this survey to reproduce it in connection with the passing mention of its author's name.

#### THE LATTICE AT SUNRISE

'As on my bed at dawn I mused and prayed,  
I saw my lattice pranked upon the wall,  
The flaunting leaves and flitting birds withal—

A sunny phantom interlaced with shade;  
"Thanks be to heaven!" in happy mood I said,  
"What sweeter aid my matins could befall  
Than this fair glory from the East hath made?  
What holy sleights hath God, the Lord of all,  
To bid us feel and see! we are not free  
To say we see not, for the glory comes  
Nightly and daily, like the flowing sea;  
His lustre pierceth through the midnight glooms;  
And at prime hour, behold! He follows me  
With golden shadows to my secret rooms!"

Byron wrote few sonnets, but those few are good; and the sonnet *On Chillon*, with its fine opening and its impressive close, may, without exaggeration be called great. The London group of nineteenth century poets—the Cockney school as it was irreverently called—had its defects and weaknesses, but it certainly maintained the high traditions of the English sonnet. The far-echoing fame of *Hyperion* and the odes has done much to drown the faint, sweet music of the sonnets of Keats; but they remain a possession from which no lover of the precious things of verse would care to part. The best known, and among general readers the most highly esteemed, of these delicately cut cameos of poetry, is undoubtedly the sonnet *On first looking into Chapman's Homer*, and the singularly impressive images to which the sestet is devoted fully

account for this high popular estimation; but it may be more than doubted whether the comparative rank assigned to this sonnet can be defended by disinterested criticism. The majority of discriminating judges will award the palm to that overpoweringly beautiful composition which was the poet's last legacy to the world, a sonnet rounded and perfect as the 'bright star' which it invokes, of moving conception and flawless workmanship, every line a delight, and the whole an enduring joy. It is unfortunate that so many of Keats' editors, Mr Main among the number, should, in reprinting this last sonnet, have adopted as the final line—

'And so live ever or else swoon to death,'

instead of the alternative reading, which has at least equal sanction—

'Half passionless, and so swoon on to death,'

which is so much more in keeping with the body of the sonnet, so much more characteristic, so much more beautiful. Only less fine than this supreme effort are the sonnets, 'The poetry of earth is never dead,' 'When I have thoughts that I may cease to be,' 'O, soft embalmer of the still midnight,' 'The day is gone, and all its

sweets are gone,' each full of the essential music, the mobile grace of nature with which Keats was so richly dowered, and each containing at least one triumph of phrasing which touches the very heart of the matter, and masters us at once. Keats' sonnets were very frequently cast in the Shakspearian mould; but his handling is so deft, that in most of them we lose the feeling of the recurring quatrains, and even of the concluding couplet, and have the sense of inwrought unity which seems to belong as of right to the true Italian form. It is only the comparatively small mass of Keats' sonnet work, certainly not any deficiency in quality, which hinders him from taking rank among the greatest of our sonneteers, as well as among the greatest of our poets.

Shelley's contribution is still more scanty, though Mr Main has added to the number of his sonnets by printing as such the successive strophes or stanzas of the *Ode to the West Wind*, which are certainly written in the sonnet form, though they have too much abandonment, too little restraint and individual completeness,—have, in short, too much of the purely lyrical quality,—to find a place among genuine sonnets. Leigh Hunt, the ardent lover of both Keats and

Shelley, was a nineteenth-century troubadour rather than a poet in the broadest and deepest sense of that word ; but he had quick sensibilities and a nimble hand, and in one well-known wit - contest he distanced his great compeers. Everyone remembers that Shelley, Keats, and Hunt each undertook to write a sonnet on the subject of the river Nile; and whether we select *Ozymandias*, or, as we certainly ought, the more recently discovered sonnet, 'Month after month the gathered rains descend,' as Shelley's contribution, it must, I think, take either the second or the third place, the first being undoubtedly held by Hunt. Hunt's sonnet is fairly familiar, but I cannot forbear to quote it; and it may safely be said that even in his most spontaneous productions the poet never excelled this little bit of pleasant task-work :—

' It flows through old hushed Egypt and its sands,  
Like some grave mighty thought threading a dream,  
And times and things, as in that vision, seem  
Keeping along it their eternal stands,—  
Caves, pillars, pyramids, the shepherd bands  
That roamed through the young world, the glory extreme  
Of high Sesostris, and that southern beam,  
The laughing queen that caught the world's great hands.  
Then comes a mightier silence, stern and strong,  
As of a world left empty of its throng

And the void weighs on us ; and then we wake,  
And hear the fruitful stream lapsing along  
'Twixt villages, and think how we shall take  
Our own calm journey on for human sake.'

From this time forward noticeable sonnets grow thicker and thicker in the field of English poetry, and adequate criticism within the limits of a single article becomes less and less possible. Hood's extraordinary gift of a certain kind of humour, and the insistent and tragical power of his world-famed social lyrics, have hindered many from fully recognising the flower-like grace of his more purely imaginative serious poetry, and as a sonnet-writer he is seldom mentioned, though all his sonnets are delicately and richly wrought, and at least two of them, *Silence* and *Death*, deserve an honoured place in the most select sonnet anthology. Those individual qualities which give their peculiar flavour to such poems as *The Haunted House* and *The Dream of Eugene Aram*—their pervading weirdness, their occasional grotesqueness—are here sublimated and etherealised ; the body of them has vanished, but the aroma remains, and the charm is complete. To this first half of the nineteenth century belong also the names of Charles Lamb, Bryan Waller Procter, John

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Clare—whose numerous sonnets are not among his best things—Thomas Noon Talfourd—whose sonnet *On the Death of Queen Caroline* is a noble poem on an unworthy theme—Thomas Lovell Beddoes, Samuel Laman Blanchard, and Joseph Blanco White, who, like the often-mentioned 'single-speech Hamilton,' is remembered as a poet by one solitary utterance.

White's magnificent sonnet on *Night* has been too often quoted for it to be necessary to reproduce it here, and so much criticised that all possible comment seems exhausted. Few will withhold a general agreement from the verdict of Coleridge, that it is 'the most grandly conceived sonnet in the language'; but it is certainly unfortunate that the execution of so great a conception should not be more perfect. The first impression it makes is almost overpowering, but it bears hardly so well as might be expected the test of repeated readings—a disappointment which is wont to occur when the strength of a poem resides in its thought rather than its craftsmanship. Concerning the two extant versions I disagree with Mr Main, who regards the first as superior to the second; but even from the latter there is absent some needed touch of perfecting grace, which, were it

there, would give the sonnet an assured and unassailable supremacy.

As we progress farther into the century we reach another of the great sonnet groups of our literature, and are compelled to make another pause. If we except Sappho, who is little more than a shade, the roll of the women poets of the world must be headed with the name of Elizabeth Barrett Browning; and her sonnets, notably the series entitled 'Sonnets from the Portuguese,' are at the apex of the mass of work which is her enduring pyramid of fame. What Wordsworth in his sonnets did for the high things of thought and ethical emotion, Mrs Browning and a later poet, yet to be spoken of, have done for the deep and secret things of passion, using the word not in the mere special sense to which usage has almost confined it, but as comprehending all intense and fervid outgoings of our nature towards God, or country, or our human fellows, or those aspects of nature which rouse within us love or awe, wonder or hushed delight. The poet in whom emotion generates thought will almost inevitably have a narrower range than the poet in whom thought supplies a justification for emotion, and Mrs Browning's sweep is

certainly less extensive than Wordsworth's; but there are in her sonnets a concentrated intensity of feeling and a piercing, resonant utterance—strong, yet with a pathetic quiver in it—which thrill and melt us as we are thrilled and melted by the voice of no other English singer. In her verse, Godward aspiration, human love and grief, the passion of sympathy and the passion for beauty, the longing of a full nature to pour out its fulness, reveal their very naked heart, and we are impressed not merely by high poetry, but by a great 'apocalypse of soul.' In the case of any human being such an apocalypse would have a strange and peculiar interest, but when the revelation is of such a soul as Mrs Browning's it becomes a thing of priceless value. As we read we know not whether we are most keenly touched by the poem or by the beating of the poet's heart behind it, by the throb of warm blood in its pulsating lines. The fine issues reveal the spirit that has been finely touched; a spirit to whom the things of the spirit were as palpable as the things of sense—to whom, as to the eye-blind but soul-seeing, Hugh Stuart Boyd :

'The sensuous and unsensuous seemed one thing,  
Viewed from one level—earth's reapers at the sheaves  
Scarce plainer than Heaven's angels on the wing.'

The purity and delicacy of Mrs Browning's nature were attested by her power of distinguishing very finely graduated shades of the higher emotions, of beholding subtle correspondences, of rendering what for most poets would be merely sighings that cannot be uttered. In such sonnets as *Grief* and *Perplexed Music*, strings which would have been snapt and silenced for ever if struck by duller hands, yield tones that are sweet and clear and full—tones to which other hearts vibrate in faint but distinguishable echoes. It is, however, in the series purporting to be 'From the Portuguese,' that Mrs Browning reveals the total potentialities of her genius. These poems are the very apotheosis of love; they form an avenue from the outermost courts of a pure and profound passion to the innermost recesses of its curtained sanctuary; and yet in no one of them is there any violation of sacred reserves, any profanation of the shrine of love; for the last solemn veil of the temple remains unlifted, though we are brought near enough to catch the odour of the incense which clouds the altar, and the hymeneal song of the invisible singers who chant before it.

In matters of mere art-technique the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* represent Mrs Browning at

her point of highest achievement. Intense as was her Shakspearian enthusiasm, she clearly felt that in his so-called sonnets Shakspeare had adopted an inferior form, and she remained faithful to the nobler Italian model, which, in the hands of Milton and Wordsworth, had been turned to such triumphant account. Nor was the effect of a choice of perfect form marred by any of those eccentricities of treatment which interfere with the fulness of our delight in some of this poet's most delight-giving work. The individual flavour is as distinct as elsewhere; never was personality more clearly discernible; but the style has cleared itself of its dross, of its undue archaism, its ruggedness, its occasional grating grotesqueness, and has, without losing force, gained ease, clearness, balance, and those qualities which in the mass we call classical. (To appraise this collection adequately is difficult; to overrate it is all but impossible.) The most commonplace man or woman who has known what it is to love purely and unselfishly feels that his soul or her soul, not less than the soul of Mrs Browning, finds a voice in these high poems; and it can hardly be presumptuous to predict that for generations to come the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* will remain, what they un-

doubtedly now are, the noblest anthology for noble lovers which our language has to show. }

The singers of what may be called the Tennysonian period are many, and most of them have been sonneteers to a greater or less extent, but the field is too wide to be reaped or even tithed here. Lord Tennyson himself has written few sonnets, and these few include one or two of his feeblest things and none of his best. No friendly critic would ever quote such an effusion as *The Bridesmaid*; and even the sonnet on the Montenegrins, strong and sonorous as it is, seems more like a Miltonic or Wordsworthian echo than an original strain. Lord Tennyson's early friend Arthur Henry Hallam wrote sonnets charged with a quiet beauty; and Mr Frederick Tennyson, as well as his brother the Rev. Charles Tennyson Turner, was a sonnet-writer needing not to be ashamed. Of the sonnet-work of Alford, Faber, Clough, the younger Roscoes, John Sterling, R. S. Hawker, and many others I must not stay to speak. The sonnets of Mr Matthew Arnold, generally devoted to the crystallisation of some elevated ethical sentiment, have a simple austerity of style which may almost be called ascetic. Those of Alexander Smith, on the other hand, emulate ✓

sometimes with fair success, the rich colour and lavish imagery of Keats, who found another follower in the young Scotch poet, David Gray, whose early death robbed the world of a sweet if not of a strong singer. The sonnets of Julian Fane, particularly those addressed to his mother, are thoroughly Shakspearian both in form and flavour and are saturated with a true and touching tenderness. Mrs Pfeiffer's sonnets have been much admired, and justly so, for they are indeed admirable, but some of them would be even more admirable if the condensation and elaboration of the thought interfered less with the transparency of the expressional vehicle. Those of Miss Christina Rossetti have grace, sweetness, unction, with a pensive charm as of a violet growing on a grave. Miss Dora Greenwell is a disciple of Mrs Browning, and has caught very happily some of the delicate *nuances* of both her feeling and style. Mr Robert Buchanan is a poet of no mean rank, but his sonnets, though often full of his special power, impress and charm us less than some of his other work. The solitary volume of verse which we owe to Mr Edward Dowden, though it has not been much talked about, cannot be read by any genuine lover of poetry without ardent admiration, and

some of the sonnets contained in it are of singularly delicate beauty. Mr Philip Bourke Marston and Mr John Payne have done some very exquisite sonnet-work; but their peculiar quality is to a large extent derivative. Their master is one who has many more followers than he perhaps cares to acknowledge—a poet of fine and subtle genius, and undoubtedly the greatest of living sonneteers—Mr Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Perhaps the most obvious positive characteristic of Mr Rossetti's poetry is its picturesqueness. He is not merely a painter *and* a poet, but a painter-poet, which is a different thing. He has too true a sense of the dignity of each separate art, and of the inevitable limitations of each vehicle of expression, to endeavour to paint poems or to write pictures; but his imagination is so concrete that its creations always present themselves to him as things of form and colour, and his sonnets spread themselves out like fair paintings on the walls of the gallery of the mind. Every poet's instinct prompts him to embody thoughts and feelings in sensuous symbols which can be grasped by the imagination; and one of the tests by which we award precedence in the poetic hierarchy is the measure of success with which this embodiment is achieved.

✓ In Mr Rossetti's case it is a large measure : we know of none larger, and his place is among the highest. We will not say that every one of his sonnets would provide a motive for an actual picture : both the form and colour may here and there be too faintly indicated for reproduction by palpable lines and pigments; but the effect upon the mind of any one of them is analogous to that produced by one of his own glowing canvases. There are in both the same restful harmonies, the same solemn splendour, the same sad yearning, the same bounteousness of beauty; and those of us who have been privileged to behold some of those special drawings or paintings to which certain of the sonnets are avowedly twin children of the master's art, turn from the picture to the poem and from the poem back to the picture, and know not which to choose, because both are so full of the qualities of delight.

Mr Rossetti's imaginative treatment is both spiritual and impassioned, the sensuous and the super-sensuous are inextricably blended, and when love is the theme of his utterances it is for the most part a love of which we know not the body from the soul. ( There is a noteworthy integrity) in his love sonnets which gives them a

peculiar interest and value. - No element is wanting, none is unduly preponderant. The poet can sing to the hautboy of the flame-winged Passion of Love, or to the sweet notes of the white winged harpist, who is Love's Worship, declaring that—

‘Through thine hautboy’s rapturous tone  
Unto my lady still this harp makes moan,  
And still she deems the cadence deep and clear.’

The first twenty-eight of Mr Rossetti’s sonnets, like the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, form a continuous series ; but in the former the situations are more varied, and the gradual transition from brightness to gloom, instead of, as in Mrs Browning’s poems, from gloom to brightness, leaves us in an entirely different mood. Mr Rossetti’s genius is, however, essentially sombre in tone ; and even one of the earliest sonnets which are the exultant outburst of a victorious love closes with the question of mournful presage :—

‘O love, my love ! if I no more should see  
Thyself, nor on the earth the shadow of thee,  
Nor image of thine eyes in any spring—  
How then should sound upon Life’s darkening slope  
The ground-whirl of the perished leaves of Hope,  
The wind of Death’s imperishable wing?’

This sombreness of effect is brought about in a strange and subtle manner. I have spoken of these sonnets as pictures, and in carrying out the comparison one may say that this effect is produced not by the use of dull colours, of browns and greys and faded tints, but rather by a miraculous mingling of rich and gorgeous hues. Mr Ruskin has somewhere observed that good colour cannot possibly be gay colour, and here the colour is always good, but gay never. Seldom in literature has there been such a combination of splendour and sadness, and both the splendour and the sadness are made all the more impressive by marvellous manipulative art. No poet has ever gained a greater amount of expressional effect by the mere sound quality of words, singly and in combination, than Mr Rossetti. He has a habit, not sufficiently obtrusive to become a trick, of ending the sestet, and occasionally the octave, with a line containing some one long sonorous word of open vowels and the most producible consonants, with now and then an additional weak syllable, which prolongs the movement and gives a felt weight and solemnity. An example may be found in the lines just quoted, but there are many others :—

‘ With sweet confederate music favourable,’  
‘ His hours elect in choral consonancy.’—  
‘ Follow the desultory feet of Death,’—  
‘ Their refuse maidenhood abominable,’—  
‘ Sleepless, with cold commemorative eyes,’—  
‘ The shame that loads the intolerable day.’

These and such lines as these, impinge upon sense and soul like a cannon-ball, and bury themselves so deeply in the memory that they cannot be unearthed. Then, too, Mr Rossetti is a master of monosyllabic words, generally so hazardous both to dignity and grace, and uses them freely, often through a whole line, and sometimes through two consecutive lines, and even into a third, with no loss, but a clear gain of both literary and emotional effect. These may seem trivial things ; but those to whom poetry is an art as well as an inspiration know that nothing is trivial which can be used as a means for stamping fine and enduring impressions. There was inspiration enough and to spare for the tuneful breath to which we listen in such sonnets as *Love-sight*, *Love-sweetness*, *Winged Hours*, *Secret Parting*, and *Mary Magdalene* ; but inspiration alone would never have realised their accomplished perfectness. It is the inspiration that masters us in such intense and sombre utterances as *Vain Virtues*, *The Sun's Shame*,

*The Refusal of Aid between Nations*, and the great and terrible *Lost Days*; but it is art which assures to inspiration the mastery. The man who wrote the sonnet *For a Venetian Pastoral by Giorgione*, which for beauty, pure, absolute, flawless, has no equal in the volumes of any English poet, is above all things an artist; and for sonnet craftsmanship which leaves us with the pleasant languor of supreme satisfaction, the delicious drowsiness of fulfilled delight, we know of nothing comparable to these great gifts which we owe to Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

To survey the history of the sonnet in England is a pleasant task, for the record is one of continued and beautiful growth. There seemed little promise in the Italian exotic which Sir Thomas Wyatt planted in English soil; but it has flourished and blossomed and borne fruit abundantly. Arbitrary as is the form of the sonnet, its arbitrariness must be in accord with great expressional laws, or so many poets would not have chosen it as the vehicle for their finest fancies, their loftiest thoughts, their intensest emotions. This choice, made so often and vindicated so splendidly, has produced a literature within a literature, a domain within a

domain, and though it is composed of scanty plots of ground, they spread over a wide expanse through which we may wander long, and yet leave many of its flowers unseen and uncultured. Rich as the sonnet literature of England is now, it is becoming every day richer and fuller of potential promise, and though the possibilities of the form may be susceptible of exhaustion, there are no present signs of it, but only of new and bounteous developments. Even were no addition made to the store which has accumulated through more than two centuries, the sonnet-work of our English poets would remain for ever one of the most precious of the intellectual possessions of the nation.

A PRE-RAPHAELITE MAGAZINE

(1882)

Most cultivated people of this generation have heard of, but comparatively few have seen, the solitary volume of a little magazine called *The Germ*, which was, during its short life, the organ of a band of young art workers, who were destined not only to become the founders of a new pictorial school, but to exert a diffused yet very recognisable influence over the entire region in which the artistic spirit can make itself at home. These youthful revolutionaries—one of the most active of whom was still in his teens, while others had only just left them behind—had become convinced that modern traditions had led painters away from the only true principle and the only worthy practice of their art; that accepted conventions had taken the place of truths of nature; that painting had therefore become more of a handicraft and less of

an inspiration ; and that to find examples of veracious and noble workmanship it was necessary to go back to the men who were the immediate predecessors of Raphael, and whose work remained as the precious memorial of a time when art had not ceased to be simple, sincere, and religious. This return to mediæval antiquity suggested a name for the reforming band, which soon became known to the world at large as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and to be initiated as the P.R.B. The original Brotherhood was a company of seven, consisting of five painters—William Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais, James Collinson, and Frederic George Stephens ; one sculptor, Thomas Woolner ; and one youth who had not then entered upon any definite career, William Michael Rossetti. Reformers are necessarily propagandists, and it would have been strange if the almost religious ardour of the Brotherhood had not sought for some medium of appeal to the outside unregenerate world. In a day of newspapers and reviews a periodical publication of some kind seemed the most natural vehicle of utterance ; and at the suggestion of one or more of the Brothers—Dante Rossetti being the prime mover

—it was resolved to set on foot a small magazine, in which the seven, and those who were in harmony with them, should speak their message and give some indication of the practical outcome of it. The magazine was to be the organ and, in the main, the production of the Brethren alone, among whom were to be divided the hypothetical profits which, it is needless to say, never became actual; and while others were to be freely welcomed as contributors, they were only to be regarded as outsiders—artistic proselytes of the gate. To one of these outsiders, however, the new venture owed its original and best-known title. At a meeting of the Brotherhood and a few friends held some time in the year 1849 in the studio of Mr Dante Rossetti in Newman Street, various names were suggested, and the final choice was made from a short list submitted by a yet living artist, Mr William Cave Thomas, at that time a young painter whose fine imagination, cultured by severe German training, had won for him a prize in the competitions for frescoes and other decorative work in the Houses of Parliament. The approved title, *The Germ*, testified at once to the modesty and to the assured confidence of the Brotherhood. It was a little thing, a seed

cast into the ground, but cast there in full belief that it would germinate, becoming, perchance, in after-days a great tree, in whose fruit men might delight and in whose shade they might rest. This significance was, however, hidden from the crowd ; and there is a legend to the effect that some careless Gallio, reading the title on the wrapper as he lounged in a bookseller's shop, did not even recognise the word, but pronounced it in a questioning sort of way as *gurm*, with a hard *g*, which pronunciation was humorously adopted by two or three of those most immediately concerned—a fact which must have supplied a foundation for the report that it was originally an affectation of the Brotherhood instead of the accidental error of an alien. Concerning these external matters, which are not of much importance—though they have an interest of their own—it is only necessary to add that, after the publication of the second number, it was found that not only was there a total absence of anything in the shape of profit, but the presence of a loss too large to be repeatedly encountered by the seven Brethren ; and the expenses of producing the third and fourth numbers were undertaken by the printer, Mr G. F. Tupper, of Clement's Lane, Lombard

Street, who had more than a merely commercial interest in the work. Mr Tupper also changed the name of the magazine, *The Germ* giving place to *Art and Poetry*, a title which was certainly more accurately descriptive than that which it superseded, but also much more commonplace, and altogether wanting in suggestiveness. When it is said that each number contained forty-eight closely-printed large octavo pages of letterpress and was illustrated with an etching, it will be very clear to those having practical experience of such matters that the inevitably small sale made the continued existence of the magazine, save as a costly hobby, altogether impossible; and the four issues, which when bound make a somewhat slender volume, were all that appeared. It had, however, found its public—its ‘audience fit, though few’—had done its work, and—it may be added without exaggeration—had in a way made its mark. As the first, and indeed the only, official manifesto or *apologia* of Pre-Raphaelitism, it has a place in the history both of English literature and English art; but apart from its propagandist aim, which indeed, eludes rather than importunes recognition, it has a permanent interest and value as a storehouse of the early

tentative experiments in critical thought and creative work of young minds who have, since its day, in many ways impressed the world.

The main supports of the undertaking were undoubtedly three members of a richly-endowed family—Dante Gabriel, William Michael, and Christina Rossetti. To the first, as has already been said, the original idea of *The Germ* was almost certainly due; the second acted as its editor throughout; and the third added much to its value by contributing, under the pen-name of Ellen Alleyne, a number of tenderly beautiful poems, in which old chords of emotion were struck in such a way as to make them seem new. In the four numbers there are fifty-one contributions, and of these twenty-three are from the pens of the two brothers and the sister; seven being by D. G. Rossetti, nine by Mr W. M. Rossetti, and seven by Miss Rossetti, a series of six 'Sonnets for Pictures' by the first-named being counted not as six but as one.

By far the greater number of the twenty-three Rossetti contributions are poems, a fact which betokens a keener instinct for creative than for controversial activity. Indeed, the magazine differs totally and very pleasantly from the typical sectarian organ—which is, as a rule, too

polemical for endurance by non-polemical people—in addressing itself mainly to those who were already more or less sympathetic, and addressing even them, not in logical hortative fashion, but allusively through images of the imagination rather than mere conceptions of the intellect. To sweep away the malaria of false tradition by storms of sad or angry rhetoric, was not a course which seemed to commend itself to the writers in *The Germ*. They chose instead to endeavour after the purification of the atmosphere by charging it with a new emotional element, which would come not with observation, so that a man might say, 'Lo, here,' or 'Lo, there,' but should slowly transform the air of the world of art and make it once more healthful. One poem of those just mentioned, the sonnet by Mr William Rossetti printed on the cover of each number, is undoubtedly a setting forth of the unavoidably militant intellectual attitude of the Brotherhood; but there is a largeness and universality in it which forbids us to regard it as a party utterance. Its laboured concentration of ideas tells against it as a poem; but it is worth reproducing as a brief statement of what the writer and his fellow-workers considered one essential portion of their message :—

'When whoso merely hath a little thought  
Will plainly think the thought which is in him—  
Not imaging another's bright or dim,  
Not mangling with new words what others taught;  
When whoso speaks, from either having sought  
Or only found, will speak, not just to skim  
A shallow surface with words made and trim,  
But in that very speech the matter brought :  
Be not too keen to cry—"So this is all !  
A thing I might myself have thought as well,  
But would not say it, for it was not worth !"  
Ask : "Is this truth ?" For is it still to tell  
That, be the theme a point or the whole earth,  
Truth is a circle, perfect, great or small ?'

The writer of this sonnet was not only the editor of *The Germ*; he was also by far its most industrious contributor. His poems have subtlety and freshness of emotion and graceful firmness of handling; but they lack impressive individuality, and we recognise in them family features rather than personal expression. Already, however, Mr W. M. Rossetti was showing his bent towards criticism; and four reviews by him—one published in each number of the magazine—if not in themselves remarkable, must be pronounced extraordinary work for a youth of eighteen, writing in the year 1850, when in the critical region the Philistines were supreme. The books noticed were 'The Bothie' of Arthur Hugh Clough; the earliest volume of

Mr Matthew Arnold's verse; Mr Cayley's now forgotten poem, 'Sir Reginald Mohun'; and the 'Christmas Eve and Easter Day' of Mr Browning. In all these criticisms one notices a studious thoroughness, an obvious attempt to catch the informing vital quality of the work under examination, which must have brought a feeling of relief and enlargement to those who were getting somewhat weary of the rough-and-ready generalising and classifying style of the literary tasters of the quarterly reviews. Perhaps the most interesting of the four was the last, which, though nominally a review of Mr Browning's companion studies of the spiritual life, was devoted to a defence of the poet's general manner, and to an exposition of the doctrine—then little understood in England—that in all true art there is such absolute union and interdependence of matter and form as to render it impossible rightly to estimate the latter apart from the former. It was then given to but few to see clearly that to judge any style *per se*, and declare it good or bad, is always more or less absurd, just as it is absurd to judge of a garment without consideration of the person for whom or the use for which it is intended; indeed, in the case of style the absurdity is greater,

for it is more than the garment of thought—it is, or ought to be, its very body, its visible incarnation. Therefore, argued the young critic, ‘appropriateness of treatment to subject . . . . lies at the root of all controversy on style; this is the last and the whole test. . . . The question of style (manner) being necessarily subordinate to that of subject (matter), it is not for the reader to dispute with the author on his mode of rendering, provided that should be accepted as embodying (within the bounds of grammatical logic), the intention preconceived.’ It will at once be seen how directly this doctrine, here applied only to literature, bears upon the pictorial methods of the Brotherhood; so directly that it might have been meant to meet some of the most popular objections to their work. Of course it does not cover the whole ground of the Pre-Raphaelite controversy, for satisfying completeness in the presentation of an artistic motive is never absolute but always relative, one truth having to yield to another which has a more insistent claim; but it meets the conventional sneer against the ugliness, the awkwardness, the crudity, the hundred sins of which the Pre-Raphaelites were supposed to be guilty, by the demand, which it is impossible to set aside as

irrelevant, that their achievement should be judged by the measure of adequacy with which it realised its intention. That the intention might itself be unworthy was indeed possible; but to decide this an appeal must be made to a higher and finer criticism than was at that day current.

The subordination of manner to matter, of form to substance, which is implicitly hinted at in this review was explicitly and much more unguardedly insisted on in two papers entitled 'The Subject in Art,' which were contributed to the first and third numbers of *The Germ* by Mr John Lucas Tupper, a relative of Mr Tupper the printer, already referred to, but unconnected with the popular writer and so-called poet of that name. He died in middle-age in the year 1879, and in a record of his work, written shortly after his decease, I find it stated that 'his mind, in matters of art, was peculiarly scientific,' a criticism amply borne out by evidence which these papers provide. The literary style of them is bald, inflexible, and even involved, resembling in many ways the style of Bishop Butler; but when the thought is once apprehended, it is seen to have the systematic logical coherence which belongs to the scientific treatment of a

theme. One point is immediately made plain, that to the writer the subject is in Art almost everything ; that at any rate it is the one thing which supplies us with a standard by which to award artistic precedence. 'Works of Fine Art,' we are told, 'delight us by the interest the objects they depict excite in the beholder, just as those objects in nature would excite his interest; if by any association of ideas in the one case, by the same in the other, without reference to the representations being other than the objects they represent. . . . At the same time, it is not disallowed that a subsequent pleasure may and does result upon reflecting that the objects contemplated were the result of human ingenuity.' As these sentences are taken from an article to which, among the prose contributions to *The Germ*, the place of honour is given, it must be taken as a sort of official utterance ; and we are compelled by it to regard the Pre-Raphaelite movement as primarily intellectual and moral rather than purely artistic. Art, we are told, consists of the ingenious representation of natural objects, and the main aim of the representation is to excite the same interest and arouse the same emotions which would be excited and aroused by the objects themselves, a quite

subsidiary interest being allowed to inhere in the 'ingenuity' of the representation. Such a theory sounds appallingly prosaic and mechanical. It is certainly a natural outcome, not of the art temperament which thinks of creation and craftsmanship alone, and cares for nothing beyond the perfect embodiment of its conceptions; but of the grave ethical mood which regards pencil and pigment as moral agencies to be used just in the same way that the preacher uses written or spoken words. Merely 'decorative works,' howsoever satisfying they may be to the hunger after beauty, have no word to speak either to the conscience or to the reflective intellect; and the writer is therefore consistent in declaring of them that they 'are not Fine Art at all.' He ignores and really seems unable to understand the possibility of finding elevated enjoyment in the contemplation of colour as colour, or form as form, and even goes so far as to assert that the first idea suggested by a painting of dead game or of cut fruit is that it is a representation of 'something to eat'; a view of the matter which would seem strange to most of us wheresoever encountered, but strangest of all, surely, in an essay written by a painter bent on unfolding the scope and purpose of his art.

I draw attention to the extravagances not for the sterile purpose of holding up to ridicule the crudities of some of the earlier disciples of Pre-Raphaelitism, but because there could be no stronger testimony to the faith of the Brotherhood in the central truth of their doctrine than the calm simplicity<sup>3</sup> with which they allowed it to be pushed to extremes of application that could not fail to be stumbling-blocks in the way of those who were asked to receive it. Such deliverances are also worth quoting for another reason. Pre-Raphaelitism is vaguely identified in many minds with the dogma embodied in the familiar formula, 'Art for Art's sake'; and this essay of Mr Tupper exhibits more strongly, though not more distinctly, than certain other papers in *The Germ*, the fundamental antagonism between them. Art, to the Brotherhood, existed not for its own sake, but rather 'for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness'; and this was not an accidental and separable element of their teaching, but the very heart and life of it. The ethical message of Pre-Raphaelitism is embodied, with greater beauty of form and cunning of dialectic than seem to have been at Mr Tupper's command, in a long 'Dialogue on Art,' published

in the last number of the magazine, and intended, had its author lived, to be the first of a series ; but he was removed by death shortly before this latest fragment of his work was given to the world. His name was John Orchard, and he was a young artist whose work in painting, though unknown to me and to all but a few, was, I am assured by one in every way competent to judge it, full not only of promise, but of performance ; rememberable, however, in virtue of quality not of mass, for 'ill health, almost amounting to infirmity—his portion from childhood—rendered him unequal to the bodily labour inseparable from his profession ; and in the course of his short life, whose youth was scarcely consummated, he exhibited from time to time only a very few small pictures, and these, as regards public recognition, in no way successfully.' The interlocutors in the dialogue are four in number, and the names given to them—Kalon, Sophon, Kosmon, and Christian—indicate the positions from which they regard Art. Kalon's view is in the main the purely æsthetic one, Sophon's the philosophic, Kosmon's the scientific, while in Christian's plea for the moral and spiritual meaning and purpose of Art the author utters his own thought. In his first

contribution to the colloquy Christian says of the artist—

He should deem his art a sacred treasure, intrusted to him for the common good ; and over it he should build, of the most precious materials, in the simplest, chastest, and truest proportions, a temple fit for universal worship : instead of which, it is too often the case that he raises above it an edifice of clay ; which, as mortal as his life, falls, burying both it and himself under a heap of dirt. To preserve him from this corruption of his art, let him erect for his guidance a standard awfully high above himself. Let him think of Christ ; and what he would not show to a nature as pure as His, let him never be seduced to work on, or expose to the world.

KOSMON : Oh, Kalon, whither do we go ? Greek art is condemned, and satire hath got its death-stroke. The beautiful is not the beautiful unless it is fettered to the moral ; and virtue rejects the physical perfections, lest she should fall in love with herself, and sin and cause sin.

CHRISTIAN : Nay, Kosmon. Nothing pure—nothing that is innocent, chaste, unsensual—whether Greek or satirical, is condemned : but everything—every picture, poem, statue, or piece of music—which elicits the sensual, viceful, and unholy desires of our nature—is, and that utterly. The beautiful was created the true, morally as well as physically ; vice is a deformment of virtue, not of form, to which it is a parasitical addition—an accretion which can and must be excised before the beautiful can show itself as it was originally made, morally as well as formally perfect. How we all wish the sensual, indecent, and brutal away from Hogarth, so that we might show him to the purest virgin without fear or blushing.’

Further on in the dialogue Kosmon contends that ‘Christian wants Art like Magdalen Hos-

pitals, where the windows are so contrived that all of earth is excluded, and only heaven is seen ;' going on to plead that 'the animal part of man wants as much caring for as the spiritual : God made both, and is equally praised through each.' To these and other objections to his view Christian replies—

So long as the pursuits, pastimes, and pleasures of mankind be innocent and chaste—with you all, heartily, I believe it matters little how or in what form they be enjoyed. Pure water is certainly equally pure whether it trickle from the hillside or flow through crystal conduits ; and equally refreshing whether drunk from the iron bowl or the golden goblet ; only the crystal and gold will better please some natures than the hillside and the iron. . . . Thus, my friends, you perceive that I am neither for building a wall nor for contriving windows so as to exclude light, air, and earth. As much as any of you I am for every man's sitting under his own vine, and for his training, pruning, and eating its fruit how he pleases. Let the artist paint, write, or carve, what and how he wills, teach the world through sense or through thought—I will not dissent ; I have no patent to entitle me to do so ; nay, I will be thoroughly satisfied with whatsoever he does, so long as it is pure, unsensual, and earnestly true. But as the mental is the peculiar feature that places man apart from and above animals, so ought all that he does to be apart from and above their nature ; especially in the fine arts, which are the intellectual perfection of the intellectual. And nothing short of this intellectual perfection—however much they may be pictures, poems, statues, or music—can rank such works to be works of Fine Art. They may have merit—may be useful, and hence, in some sort, have a purpose ; but they are as much works of Fine Art as Babel was the Temple of Solomon.

Enough has been quoted to show the high spiritual aim of the Brotherhood, an aim to which even their passion for veracity of presentation was subordinated. Truthfulness in Art was pursued not as an end but as a means to the achievement of a great ethical purpose; and the witness of Art to holiness was declared to be as distinct as the witness of that Puritanism which, in the interests of holiness, had declared Art an unclean thing. It has, however, already been noted that dogmatic or even expository utterances form but a very small portion of the contents of *The Germ*, and the portion, too, which is, as a whole, least attractive, save to those who are interested in tracing the history and development of art ideas. What is done is of more import and interest than theories of the manner in which it should be done; and one turns without regret from Mr Tupper's scholastic definitions, and even from Mr Orchard's eloquent dialectic, to the poems and etchings which were among the earliest blades that sprouted from the new seed—things pleasant in themselves, and pleasanter for their promise of harvest.

Midway between the purely critical and the purely creative work stands a little biographical

study entitled, 'Hand and Soul,' a story of the days and works of a painter, one Chiaro dell' Erma, written by Mr Dante Rossetti, and apparently meant by him to be a setting forth of his ideal of the artistic life. *The Germ* contains nothing with a more insistent charm than this piece of portraiture, which is instinct with a beautiful *naïveté*, almost unique in modern writing; with a singular simplicity, austere but never bald, having that nameless grace and glamour after which elaboration often labours in vain; and with an impressive unction, like that of which we are conscious as we turn over the illuminated pages of some book of devotions which has given words to the wordless sighs of generations of penitents. The little story was a prophecy in words that was to be fulfilled in lines and colours: it possessed just the pictorial qualities which years afterwards made the pictured shapes of the Palm-bearing Sybil and the Blessed Damozel for ever memorable to all who stood before them. It is the record of the outer and inner life of a painter; of how he yearned for fame, but when he found that fame was lightly won, cared no more to strive, but only to live his own life and take his own pleasure; how he was arrested in his course by hearing speech of a

youth who had been faithful when he had been faithless ; how he then took to work diligently, so that no day more might be lost, but gaining fame, found that a weight was still at his heart; how, when he questioned himself, he feared that, being glad in his work, he had mistaken for faith the worship of beauty, and accordingly set himself to the presentment of moral greatness, not dealing, as heretofore, with the action and passion of human life, but with cold symbolism and abstract impersonation, so that men no more cared to look upon his work; and how, finally, there appeared to him an image of his own soul in the fashion of a beautiful woman in sad-coloured garments, who told him that he had erred in saying coldly to the mind what God had said to the heart warmly, that God needed not his help in strengthening Him among men, bidding him 'work from thine own heart simply, for His heart is as thine when thine is wise and humble, and He shall have understanding of thee,' leaving with him this final message, 'Know that there is but this means whereby thou mayst serve God with man—set thine hand and thy soul to serve man with God.'

This narrative study makes manifest the essential spirit of Pre-Raphaelitism, and along

with some of the poems by the same writer and by his sister, Miss Rossetti, may be accepted as a satisfying concrete embodiment of them. These poems, or the greater number of them, are still better known, having been printed in the volumes of verse given to the world by the authors in later years; but in some cases the final form differs widely from the original one, and in every example of this difference with which I have acquainted myself the later version shows that the firm hand of the master has given the needed touch of grace to the tentative 'prentice work of the learner. The uncollected work I shall not disinter. One or two poems tempt me very strongly, notably a finely-felt piece of meditative description by Mr Dante Rossetti, entitled 'The Carillon—Antwerp and Bruges'; but so long as the writers live, it is theirs to say by what utterances the world shall know them. The poems familiar to Mr Rossetti's present-day readers which first saw the light in *The Germ* were 'My Sister's Sleep,' 'The Blessed Damozel,' four of the 'Sonnets for Pictures,' and a poem there called 'On the Cliffs,' which appears in the volume as 'The Sea Limits,' with several happy variations, and four stanzas instead of the original two. One may, perhaps, without im-

propriety, show how under these last touches the poetical work of Mr Rossetti, beautiful from the first, has gained its finality of achieved perfection, by giving the two forms of that sonnet on the 'Venetian Pastoral' in the Louvre, which is attributed to Giorgione, and is certainly instinct with the spirit of that inspired and inspiring master. Here is the sonnet as it appeared in *The Germ* :—

'Water, for anguish of the solstice—yea,  
Over the vessel's mouth still widening  
Listlessly dipt to let the water in  
With slow, vague gurgle. Blue, and deep away,  
The heat lies silent at the brink of day.  
Now the hand trails upon the viol-string  
That sobs, and the brown faces cease to sing,  
Mournful with complete pleasure. Her eyes stray  
In distance; through her lips the pipe doth creep  
And leave them pouting; the green-shadowed grass  
Is cool against her naked flesh. Let be :  
Do not now speak unto her lest she weep,  
Nor name this ever. Be it as it was—  
Silence of heat and solemn poetry.'

And here is the reading given in the volume of 1870 :—

'Water, for anguish of the solstice—nay,  
But dip the vessel slowly—nay, but lean  
And hark how at its verge the wave sighs in—  
Reluctant. Hush ! Beyond all depth away  
The heat lies silent at the brink of day :

Now the hand trails upon the viol-string  
That sobs, and the brown faces cease to sing,  
Sad with the whole of pleasure. Whither stray  
Her eyes now, from whose mouth the slim pipes creep  
And leave it pouting, while the shadowed grass  
Is cool against her naked side? Let be:  
Say nothing now unto her lest she weep,  
Nor name this ever. Be it as it was—  
Life touching lips with Immortality.

No lover and student of poetry will miss to recognise either the solemn and subduing loveliness of the original model or the subtle feeling for absolute rightness which in the finished work has transformed beauty of suggestion into the rarer beauty of adequate and utter realisation. The reader who has any feeling for the language of rhythm will mark how much of a certain precision of interpretative rendering is gained by the added pauses in the second and fourth verses — pauses that he instinctively lengthens, as if to give the ear time to attune itself to the low sighing of the wave; or, if this be too purely a point in *technique* to arrest his attention, he will surely note the keenness of imaginative sensation, which, by changing the insistently audible gurgle into a sigh, which we must wait and hush to hear, has given so different and so much truer a quality to the cool sound which, save the sob of the viol-string,

is the only one to break, if indeed it do not rather intensify, the languid silence of the noon. The eighth verse has become perfectly musical and perfectly expressive, the early version not being quite either; and the change, which begins here and runs through the following verses, from the indicative to the interrogatory mode, informs the interpretation with the beautiful mystery of fulfilled delight which is the supreme charm of the thing interpreted. Or, not to mention minor matters, such as the gain of the epithet 'slim,' which is a picturesque touch, one might stay to mark the substitution of 'naked side' for 'naked flesh,' which in nine cases out of ten would be only the exchange of a strong word for a weak one, but is here the effectual stroke of artistic masterhood—the gain not merely of the one needed vowel sound, though that is something, but of a truer rendering of the spirit of work from which aggressively sensuous realism is altogether excluded, and in which the appeal is not to sense, but to emotion. Had the sonnet been for a Rubens instead of for a Giorgione, the 'flesh' would have remained: here it strikes a false note, and so it goes—to its own place. Of the relative weight and value of the concluding verse in the early

and in the late form respectively little need be said. The first conclusion,

‘Silence of heat and solemn poetry,’

is doubtless a due and full setting forth of the sensuous and imaginative quality of the work celebrated, but it is redundant, a saying over again of what has been said before. There is something remaining to be said. The picture has not merely its quality; it has its mystery, its secret, its soul—unknown, perhaps unknowable; its vision—unapprehended, perhaps unapprehensible; but may not the mystery, the secret, the soul, the vision be this—

‘Life touching lips with Immortality’?

It would be interesting to go in like manner through the two versions of ‘The Blessed Damozel,’ which appeared in the second number of *The Germ*, and see how by rejection or addition of stanza or phrase the same perfecting has been accomplished; but the task must be reserved for other time than this, and I must leave for the present the work of this weightiest contributor to the little magazine, and also that of Miss Rossetti, not because the latter is not almost equally delightful, but because readers may find

most of it in her published volumes, unchanged generally in feature and expression. A hope must, however, be expressed that the writer may some day be induced to republish a poem entitled 'Repinings,' containing one or two descriptive passages which move the imagination and linger in the memory. The remaining poetical contents of the thin volume call for no special comment; but it is pleasant to find the chief place in the first number given to two poems by the then little-known sculptor of the Brotherhood—poems which were the first instalment of the tender and gracious monody known to the world as 'My Beautiful Lady.' These are followed by a sonnet on 'The Love of Beauty,' from the pen of a now distinguished painter, not otherwise known as a poet, Mr Ford Madox Brown. The peculiar mediæval spirituality of the new movement found a delicate metrical embodiment in a poem by another of the seven brethren, Mr James Collinson, 'The Child Jesus; a Record typical of the Five Sorrowful Mysteries,' the beauty of which is at once severe, pensive, and solemn. The first and last of these poems are illustrated by etchings; Mr Holman Hunt accompanying Mr Woolner's work with two designs, the second of which is characterised by strong,

passionate realisation; and Mr Collinson mating his own poem with a beautiful invention—archaic indeed, but not therefore unattractive to those who are generally repelled by archaism, because so evidently sincere and spontaneous. The etchings in the other two numbers have both Shakspearian motives. Mr Madox Brown's farewell of Cordelia to her sisters is the more ambitious, and has good qualities of composition, but cannot be spoken of as pleasing or even interpretative, Cordelia having the simper of a rather silly and conceited girl delivering herself of some moral platitude, while her sisters are simply two ill-tempered women resenting the gratuitous homily. The head of Regan has character, however, but is too suggestive of Blake, and is probably a reminiscence. It is, however, only just to add that the work was executed very hurriedly to supply the place of an etching which had been prepared by Mr D. G. Rossetti, but at the last moment rejected by him as inadequate. Mr W. H. Daverell's 'Viola and Olivia' is in no way noteworthy, and, considered as etchings, the four illustrations must be pronounced amateurish and unimpressive, being so largely deficient in that impulsive freedom of treatment which it is the glory of the etching

needle to secure. What worth they have inheres in their quality as designs.

Of two suggestive articles no mention has been made. The first of these, an essay on 'The Purpose and Tendency of Early Italian Art,' by Mr John Seward, another young painter, covers much of the same ground that is traversed by Mr Tupper and Mr Orchard; but is specially interesting as showing the true nature of the impulse which drew the Brotherhood and its associates to the work of the Pre-Raphael painters. The other article is of a very different character. It is a critical analysis by Mr Coventry Patmore of the character of Macbeth, intended to prove that a 'design of illegitimately obtaining the crown of Scotland had been conceived by Macbeth, and that it had been communicated by him to his wife prior to his first meeting with the witches,' of whose evil suggestions the action and catastrophe of the play are commonly supposed to be the results. This view of the tragedy, then novel, has of late been popularised by the subtly-conceived impersonation of Mr Henry Irving, and expounded with weight and lucidity by Mr E. R. Russell of Liverpool, one of the few provincial journalists who to literary facility add fine and wide culture;

but Mr Patmore was the first to break new ground, and his study really left little in the way of additional proof to be gathered together by those coming after him. In soundness, sanity, and sympathetic insight into the essential spirit of Shakspeare's portraiture, it offers a pleasing contrast to some of the eccentric *banalités* which have of late years presented themselves as contributions towards the comprehension of the great master's work.

Such are the principal contents of a magazine which will always retain its interest for lovers both of pictorial and literary art. Copies are anything but numerous, and in those that have been bound it often happens that the key to the authorship of the various articles and poems is missing, through the neglect of the binder to preserve the covers of the separate numbers, on the inside page of which are given the names of the writers in all the numbers after the first. The book is seldom in the market, and many booksellers' catalogues may be searched for it in vain. The etched plates have possibly not been preserved; but if the consent of the editor and principal writers were obtained, a reprint of the letterpress would be regarded by many as a thing of price. One may hope that, some day, such will be forthcoming.

LEIGH HUNT :  
THE MAN AND THE WRITER  
(1886)

AT a time when a biographer is found for almost every man who becomes known in any degree to the world at large, it is strange that we should have no adequate record of the life of Leigh Hunt, and specially strange that no place should have been found for him in that very Catholic series of volumes devoted exclusively to 'English Men of Letters.' True, Hunt was less eminent than some who are there commemorated : he cannot, for example, be fitly placed by the side of Chaucer and Milton, Bunyan and Burke; but there are others among whom he might sit as among his peers, and there is, perhaps, not one in Mr Morley's gallery of worthies who can be more accurately defined as a man of letters pure and simple. He was not, like Gibbon or Wordsworth or Dickens, pre-eminent in any one

province of the republic of letters, but he was a free citizen of the whole domain. Loving literature with a passionate ardour, the work of his life was an expression of his love ; and he is best described by a vague but large phrase of his friend Carlyle as a 'writer of books.'

Though a formal biography is wanting, a fairly satisfactory record of the really productive years in the life of Leigh Hunt is to be found in the *Autobiography* and in the two volumes of *Correspondence*, edited by his son ; the former being one of the most fascinating personal narratives to be found anywhere, and the latter a singularly attractive contribution to what may be described as postal literature. James Henry Leigh Hunt—the first two Christian names were dropped early in life—was born at what was then the little village of Southgate, Middlesex, on the 19th of October, 1784. His father was a Creole, being of European race, but of West Indian birth. Beginning life as a lawyer, he forsook law for divinity, and, after his emigration from Barbadoes to England, became a popular metropolitan preacher, but in his later years adopted Unitarian and Universalist opinions. His mother, an American of English descent, had Quaker blood in her veins ;

and those who love to note the phenomena of heredity will find in Leigh Hunt very noteworthy 'strains' both of the paternal and the maternal stock. His father had what may be called a tropical temperament—eager, sanguine, pleasure-loving, careless; and from him his son doubtless inherited the bright cheerfulness, the healthy optimism, and the lack of ordinary practicality by which he was always distinguished; while there is as little doubt that he derived from his mother that dainty refinement and exquisiteness of discrimination, both in matters of art and of conduct, which gives a peculiarly winning charm at once to his life and to his work. To both parents he probably owed something of that genial enthusiasm of humanity which informs every line that came from his pen, and which found its most memorable and perfect expression in the little poem entitled 'Abou Ben Adhem.'

Hunt's was a childhood full of the quick terrors and the vitalising delights which are the dower of an actively procreant imagination and a singularly sensitive physical and intellectual organism. He was sent to school to Christ Hospital—commonly, and, as he assures us, erroneously known as Christ's Hospital—and

the long chapter in the *Autobiography* which is devoted to his school-days is, as a piece of delightful gossip, unexcelled by any of the more eventful chapters by which it was followed. Hunt describes himself with obvious truthfulness as an 'ultra-sympathising and timid boy,' but his timidity was evidently that which comes of quick sensitiveness rather than of what we ordinarily understand as cowardice; indeed, it is clear that where occasion called he was deficient neither in physical nor moral courage. In one sense of the word Hunt may be spoken of as a precocious boy—that is, if the epithet can be applied to taste as well as to talent. He revelled in such literature as came in his way, which seems to have been principally the poetry of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and what he admired he imitated, writing 'odes' because Collins and Gray had written them, 'pastorals' because Pope had written them, 'blank verse' because Akenside and Thomson had written blank verse, and a 'Palace of Pleasure' because Spenser had written a 'Bower of Bliss.' The elder Hunt, who was proud of his boy's gift, purely imitative as it was, collected these verses and had them published by subscription in 1801, the volume being adorned with an engraved

portrait of its juvenile author, who thus in his eighteenth year had the proud satisfaction of feeling himself a full-blown man of letters. Of course he still continued to write, but a casual occurrence turned his attention from verse to prose. He was presented by his father with a set of the 'British Classics,' and, becoming at once enamoured of the art of essay writing, contributed to the *Traveller*, an evening journal of the period, a number of papers which were accepted with effusion; though the writer had to be content, and, as a matter of fact, was more than content, with a very unsubstantial return in the form of five or six copies of the issues in which his lucubrations appeared. Other and somewhat more profitable journalistic work followed: in 1807—that is when he was twenty-three years of age—we find him contributing theatrical criticisms to the *Times*, and in 1808 his brother John and himself established a weekly paper, the *Examiner*, by which he was destined to win what his friends called fame, his enemies notoriety. This was not the first experiment in journalism made by the two brothers, for in 1805 they set up a little paper called the *News*, which had but a short life and little influence; though Leigh Hunt's own

articles on matters theatrical attracted attention by their novel independence of tone, it having been the practice of pressmen, up to this date, to accept 'orders' as payment in full for indiscriminate puffery. Drawn by the current of circumstance rather than inclination, Leigh Hunt soon found himself in the whirlpool of controversies far more tumultuous than those earlier ones concerning the merits of this actor or that play. Hunt says of the *Examiner*, 'It began by being of no party; but Reform soon gave it one. It disclaimed all knowledge of statistics; and the rest of its politics were rather a sentiment and a matter of general training than founded on any particular political reflection.' As a matter of fact, *nascitur non fit* is as true of the politician as of the poet; and it was one of the oddest of the ironies of fate that a man who was absolutely devoid of native bent towards politics, and to whom one Spenser or Petrarch was of more consequence than a score of Broughams or Burdetts, should be known earliest and longest, not as a gentle flower-gatherer on the slopes of Parnassus, but as the fiery irreconcilable who had been sent to prison for libelling a prince.

In Hunt's private life at this time the most

important event was his marriage in July 1809 to Miss Marianne Kent, a young lady to whom he had been engaged since his very early youth; so that, roughly speaking, his life of quiet domesticity and of very unquiet publicity may be said to have begun together. As for the *Examiner*, it was soon in stormy waters. Having, as Hunt describes, drifted into an alliance with the party of Reform, its fealty knew no half-heartedness; and the legal functionaries of a Tory Government soon found that a new and formidable antagonist was in the field, and aimed their artillery in his direction. Several attempted prosecutions were more or less ineffective; but at last Hunt gave the enemy an opportunity of which advantage was promptly taken. That never heroic or admirable person, George, Prince of Wales, had become George, Prince Regent; and the popularity which had been his when he was supposed to be the advocate for popular reform measures, and especially for concession to the Catholic claims, had not only vanished, but had been replaced by an aggressive unpopularity which expressed itself with no reticence or shyness. On St Patrick's Day, 1812, there was held the annual banquet of Irishmen resident in

London, and the name of the Prince, which had at previous similar gatherings been received with rapture, was greeted first with significant silence and then with still more significant hisses. The occurrence could not well be ignored by the Ministerial party, and its organ, the *Morning Post*, endeavoured to compensate its royal patron for the annoying incident by a leading article so crammed with ludicrously misapplied compliment that, if the Prince had possessed a keen sense of humour, he would have felt that the eulogies of his journalistic friend were harder to bear than the hisses of his convivial foes. To this article the *Examiner* replied; and a few sentences from this reply—which was written by Hunt himself—serve to show something of the rather crude manner in which newspaper flattery was administered, {and newspaper controversy conducted in those blithe days of the Regency. The writer is nearing the close of his article, and has evidently warmed to his subject. He asks :—

‘What person unacquainted with the true state of the case could imagine that this “Glory of the people” was the subject of millions of shrugs and reproaches !—that this “Protector of the Arts” had named a wretched foreigner his

historical painter, in disparagement or in ignorance of the merits of his own countrymen!—that this “Mæcenas of the age” had not patronised a single deserving writer!—that this “Breather of eloquence” could not say a few decent extempore words, if we are to judge, at least, from what he said to his regiment on its embarkation for Portugal!—that this “Conqueror of hearts” was the disappointer of hopes!—that this “Exciter of desire” [bravo! Messieurs of the *Post*!—this “Adonis in loveliness” was a corpulent man of fifty!—in short, this *delightful, blissful, wise, honourable, virtuous, true and immortal* prince was a violater of his word, a libertine over head and ears in disgrace, a despiser of domestic ties, the companion of gamblers and demireps, a man who has just closed half a century without one single claim on the gratitude of his country or the respect of posterity! These are hard truths; but are they not truths? And have we not suffered enough—are we not now suffering bitterly—from the disgusting flatteries of which the above is a repetition? The Ministers may talk of the shocking boldness of the press, and may throw out their wretched warnings about interviews between Mr Percival and Sir Vicary



Gibbs; but let us inform them that such vices as have just been enumerated are shocking to all Englishmen who have a just sense of the state of Europe; and that he is a bolder man who, in times like the present, dares to afford reason for the description. Would to God that the *Examiner* could ascertain that difficult, and perhaps indiscoverable point which enables a public writer to keep clear of an appearance of the love of scandal, while he is hunting out the vices of those in power.'

It may reasonably be inferred that such an article would be the subject of more than one of those interviews between Mr Percival and Sir Vicary Gibbs. The result of the interviews was a prosecution, and the result of the prosecution was that the brothers Hunt were sentenced to undergo two years' imprisonment in separate gaols and to pay a fine of a thousand pounds. They had previously been informed in a quiet, but evidently authoritative manner, that if they would take a pledge of total abstinence from attacks on the Regent means should be found to remit both fine and imprisonment; but the compromise was rejected, and Leigh Hunt was conveyed to Surrey Gaol, while John was immured in Clerkenwell. To no man of sensi-

tive physical, and emotional organisation can the closing behind him of a prison door be anything but a shock, and to Leigh Hunt it was specially trying, for he was at the time in feeble health. His was, however, a spirit of brave invincible cheerfulness; and most even of those who know little else about him have heard the story of how he had the walls of his room papered with a trellis of roses, the ceiling covered with clouds and sky, the barred windows screened with venetian blinds, while for companionship he provided himself with his books, his busts, his pianoforte, and—it need hardly be added—unfailing relays of flowers. Modern æstheticism would, perhaps, consider the arrangement a little flamboyant, but there was something about it which corresponded to a certain expansive, dainty, luxuriousness in the nature of the arranger; and even people who write these little manuals on ‘Art in the House,’ which make some of us feel such terrible Philistines, are unanimous in insisting on the necessity of this very correspondence between man and his dwelling-place. The cell, thus transformed into a bower, was a surprise and delight to troops of friends, for the prisoner was not debarred from other society than his books

and flowers. He had much of the companionship of his wife and children; and, besides his old friends, he was visited by new ones drawn to him by political or literary sympathies. Among his many prison guests were Brougham, Byron, Hazlitt, Charles and Mary Lamb, Mr and Mrs Cowden Clarke; and here, too, he made the supreme but too brief friendship of his life, for one of his visitors was Percy Bysshe Shelley. This beloved name was now added to a list of literary intimates of whom any man might well be proud—a list which, in addition to the names just mentioned already, included those of Thomas Campbell, James and Horace Smith, Theodore Hook, and others, and in which the still more memorable names of Keats and Coleridge were soon to be enrolled. Indeed, even these early years of Leigh Hunt's career were so rich in all the interest that attaches to poetry, art, literary converse, and all such gracious sweeteners and adorners of life that we are almost tempted to resent the rough intrusion of these turbulent political polemics which seem to be, and, in a measure really were, alien elements. And yet, if one considers it again, it is impossible to wish that Hunt's life had been other than what it was. The friends who have spoken in his praise

—and is not their name legion?—have dwelt first and last and most lovingly upon those genialities and graces and sweetnesses which give to character its charm; it is worth much to those of us who admire Hunt as warmly as we love him, to know that he was in no wise deficient in those less fascinating, but more essentially virile qualities, which give to character structure, organism, power of influence, and power of resistance. It is, as Goethe has somewhere said, a weakness to be devoid of capacity for noble indignation. Hunt had the capacity, and he had also the courage and fortitude to make it effectual.

It is nevertheless pleasant to have the opportunity provided by this period of enforced leisure in Hunt's life to note the work of this period which was more truly representative of his inner individuality than was the most sincere and eager attack upon corruption in high places. At the time of his imprisonment he had published a lively volume of essays on the principal London actors; he had edited five volumes of 'Classic Tales,' and written various essays by which they were accompanied; and had moreover contributed numerous other essays to the *Reflector*, a very miscellaneous collection of

such compositions of which he was the editor. While in prison he published 'The Descent of Liberty; a Mask,' the subject of which was the downfall of Napoleon; and shortly after his release appeared, with a dedication to Lord Byron, his first really important work in verse, 'The Story of Rimini,' concerning which later on a word or two must be said.

The friendship of Shelley was now the pleasantest element in the life of Leigh Hunt, and after his emancipation from Surrey gaol, the only noticeably unpleasant elements were provided by his occasional ill-health and his almost constant pecuniary anxieties. Of these anxieties it is only necessary to say that they were caused partly by the drain upon his purse, which necessarily resulted from the Government prosecution; partly by his own want of business capabilities, which he repeatedly acknowledges and deplores almost as if it were a crime; and partly by a fact, in no way discreditable to Hunt himself, which was, and is, well-known to many of his friends, but which cannot be touched upon, save in this allusive fashion without inflicting undeserved pain upon innocent living persons. The correspondence of this period is rich in most delightful letters from

Hunt to Shelley, from Shelley to Hunt, and from the two wives, each to each, the four falling quickly into an easy, intimate, brotherly and sisterly fashion of converse. Of Shelley, Hunt was not merely friend, but champion; for the author of the revolutionary *Queen Mab* was running the gauntlet of criticism, the ferocity of which was intensified by both political and theological hostility; and the *Examiner* was not merely staunch in defence, but enthusiastic in eulogy. In Keats, Hunt found another friend in need of a defender, and the defence was not lacking either vigour or constancy. So far as the general reading public are concerned, Hunt was the discoverer of Keats, and not only his discoverer, but his faithful interpreter, pointing out lovingly, by means of his 'sign-post criticism,' (as it has been called somewhat disparagingly by those who profess to need no guidance along the byways of literature), those magical facilities of insight and expression which even in his earliest and crudest work testified that here was a poet of the true royal line. The loyalty of the elder singer to his younger but greater competitor—for it cannot be pretended that any of Hunt's work in poetry can rank with the 'large utterance' of *Hyperion* — is

very beautiful; and it must be regretted that Lord Houghton, in his memoir of Keats, gave permanence to the petulant complaining, engendered by the morbidity of mortal disease, in which Keats at one time indulged. To these complainings Hunt in the *Autobiography* makes a reply, needless to those who are familiar with the files of the *Examiner*, but in itself so affecting and persuasive in its restrained pathos of remonstrance, that I quote a few sentences. Hunt writes :

‘I learned the other day, with extreme pain, . . . that Keats at one period of his intercourse with us suspected both Shelley and myself of a wish to see him undervalued! Such are the tricks which constant infelicity can play with the most noble natures. For Shelley let *Adonais* answer. For myself, let every word answer that I uttered about him, living and dead, and such as I now proceed to repeat. I might have been as well told that I wished to see the flowers or the stars undervalued, or my own heart that loved him. . . . Keats appears to have been of opinion that I ought to have taken more notice of what the critics said against him. And perhaps I ought. My notices of them may not have been sufficient. I

may have too much contented myself with panegyrising his genius, and thinking the objections to it of no ultimate importance. Had he given me a hint to another effect I should have acted upon it. But, in truth, as I have before intimated, I did not see a twentieth part of what was said against us, nor had I the slightest notion, at that period, that he took criticism so much to heart. I was in the habit, though a public man, of living in a world of abstractions of my own; and I regarded him as of a nature still more abstracted and sure of renown. . . I little suspected, as I did afterwards, that the hunters had struck him; and never at any time did I suspect that he could have imagined it desired by his friends. Let me quit the subject of so afflicting a delusion.'

It might be quitted here also, were it not well to take a moment's notice of a reiteration and elaboration of Keats' complaint made by Mr Hall Caine in his 'Cobwebs of Criticism.' Mr Caine adheres to the view which the dying poet in his saner hours repudiated, and asks scornfully what Leigh Hunt did for Keats. A more extraordinary question has seldom been put. What rather, it should be asked, did Hunt not do, except reply to criticisms of the very exist-

ence of which he was ignorant? From the close of 1816, when Keats, who was then entirely unknown, was introduced by Hunt to the reading public, to the day of his untimely taking off, the pages of the *Examiner* and the *Indicator* are rich in the warmest tributes to his genius, and it is noteworthy that in 1818, which witnessed the appearance of the notorious review in the *Quarterly*, and which Mr Caine specially notes as the year of Hunt's silence, Hunt published, in the little volume of verse entitled 'Foliage,' three sonnets addressed to Keats, in which his genius is celebrated in phrases which may almost be described as those of affectionate hyperbole.

This friendship, however, loyal and enthusiastic as it was, had but a brief continuance. Poor Keats bade farewell to all his friends but one, and set out on his journey southward and sunward, in search of the health that might bring with it new visions of beauty, to find only the one solemn vision of the beyond. Shelley also found his way to Italy and to death; but in his case the end was not yet, and before it came Hunt and he were destined to meet on the shores of a land dear to both. This Italian visit of Hunt's was but an episode in

his life, which might be very briefly dismissed were it not that in some of its occurrences Hunt's calumniators have found material for their most malignant attacks; and therefore in Hunt's vindication a somewhat full statement of the facts is necessary. In the beginning of the year 1821, not only Shelley, but Lord Byron, who had been driven from England by the voice of public opinion, was making for himself a temporary home in Italy; and the two poets were brought into tolerably close companionship. Byron was determined that though condemned to exile he would not be condemned to silence, and he confided to Shelley a scheme for the establishment of a periodical publication through which his voice might still be heard. The result of the talks between the two friends was a letter addressed by Shelley to Hunt, dated August 26, in which Hunt was invited to come over to Italy to assist in the production of the new venture, and to be an equal sharer in the profits with Lord Byron, as Shelley himself, though promising co-operation, refused to accept any portion of the gains. Hunt was naturally tempted by the offer. The fortunes of the *Examiner* were languishing; the health of its editor was in a most precarious

condition; Italy was dear to Hunt, as the land of poetry and romance; and dearer still was the friend to whose side he had been summoned. Monetary difficulties were really the only obstacle, but by Shelley's assistance they were removed, and Hunt and his family set sail for the South. After a voyage full of delays and dangers the voyagers reached their destination, landing at Leghorn early in the July of 1822. Here they were joined by Shelley, and in a few days removed to Pisa, where rooms had been provided for the Hunts, in a palazzo rented by Lord Byron. The two friends were delighted to be again in each other's society, and both looked forward to a period of long and happy companionship. The hope was vain, for the mutual greetings had hardly been exchanged when Shelley bade the little circle at Pisa what turned out to be his last farewell, and started on the fatal voyage from which he came back no more. This terrible catastrophe, which robbed Hunt of his best friend, and the world of one of its truest poets, had also the effect of bringing Hunt into an unfair and wholly unexpected relation of dependence upon Lord Byron. Byron's enthusiasm in the matter of the *Liberal*, the name which had

been proposed for the new magazine, had begun to cool; but instead of acquainting Hunt with this fact, he adopted a policy of simple procrastination; and Hunt, who had come out, relying upon assurances that the work would be commenced at once, was condemned not only to enforced indolence, but to the humiliation of having to ask for aid, which, by no fault of his own, was unearned, and which when asked for, was doled out grudgingly and contemptuously, as it might have been to a too importunate mendicant. Byron found Hunt uncongenial; Mrs Hunt he positively detested; and the children irritated him, though he seems to have condescended to an endeavour to corrupt the morals of one of the boys. His letters to friends in England were full of expressions of dissatisfaction with his own scheme, and of complaints against Hunt, buttressed by the lying statement that he had only engaged in the undertaking, because Hunt and his brother had pressed him to do so. Eventually, the first number of the *Liberal* appeared, and it was followed by three others, though it was clear from the first that it lacked the kind of vitality which is essential to permanence. Certainly it contained *The Vision of Judgment*,

that greatest satirical effort of a writer who was greater in satire than in anything else, and it contained also Shelley's translation of the *Wal-purgis Nacht* from *Faust*, and some of Hazlitt's most vigorous essays ; but it had no obvious unity of purpose which would make any special class of readers eager to welcome it, and when, after the publication of the fourth number, Byron withdrew in disgust, the fatal blow only antedated an inevitable and early natural decease. Hunt's own articles were quantitatively the most important part of the contents, and they were bright, graceful, and eminently characteristic ; but they certainly had not body and weight enough to supply the intellectual momentum required for a literary projectile which was intended to accomplish such great things in the battering down of strongholds. The *Liberal* died, as it was bound to die ; and Hunt and Byron parted for ever, the former travelling westward to life in England, the other eastward to death in Greece. After Byron's death, Hunt published a work entitled *Recollections of Lord Byron and some of his Contemporaries*, in which he told the story of his relations with his noble brother poet—truthfully it need hardly be said, but not unnaturally with some touches of

bitterness. Byron's friends were, as naturally, enraged, and retaliated, I was about to say in kind; but the phrase is hardly appropriate to describe a retaliation in which unpleasant truths are met by still more unpleasant falsehoods. These and other falsehoods have been adopted without any serious question by Lord Byron's latest biographers, Professor Nichol and Mr Cordy Jeaffreson, and one of them, which is at once the most injurious and the most recently invented, has even found its way into Mr Leslie Stephen's otherwise trustworthy article on Lord Byron in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Hunt was accused, in the first place, of flagrant ingratitude to a man who had been his lavish benefactor, and whose only offence was that he had resisted Hunt's importunities when they became too frequent and eager to be longer borne. To this charge even the very brief statement of facts that has been given is a sufficient reply, and Hunt was able to dispose of it triumphantly by publishing in the *Morning Chronicle* a letter in which he proved that, so far from Byron having been generous, he had not even been just; that instead of loading Hunt with favours, he had not even fulfilled his pledged obligations. To other charges Hunt

could not reply, for the sufficing reason that they have only been formulated since his death. It has been asserted that the commoner poet had disgusted the lordly one by assumptions of undue familiarity, the necessary implication being that the *Recollections* were prompted by wounded vanity. Professor Nichol, for example, tells us that 'Hunt could never recognise the propriety of the claim to deference which the "noble poet" was always too eager to assert, and was inclined to take liberties which his patron perhaps too superciliously repelled.' This statement sounds plausible, but it has the one defect of being inconsistent with facts which compel us to acquit Hunt of presumption and Byron of superciliousness. It has been more than once remarked that while Byron had an intense and prideful consciousness of his rank, he was anxious to be thought superior to such a weakness; and Hunt annoyed him not by taking liberties, but by the diametrically opposite offence of constantly shewing his remembrance of the social gulf which separated the journalist from the peer. In the early days of their friendship the formalities of ceremonial intercourse had been dropped on both sides, and, after the manner of intimates, they had

addressed each other as 'Byron' and 'Hunt.' Events had sundered them for a time, and when, on Hunt's arrival in Italy, the intercourse was renewed, his increased knowledge of the world, and probably an instinctive perception of Lord Byron's weakness, prompted him to conform to habits of action and of speech which acknowledged decorously but not effusively the claims of rank. His lordship recognised the change, and visibly chafed under it, expressing his annoyance in a half-serious, half-humorous manner, by beginning a letter to Hunt with the words 'Dear Lord Hunt'—a piece of harmless banter at which the recipient of the letter laughed so heartily and good-naturedly that he compelled the writer not only to join in his merriment but to leave him to act upon his own notions of etiquette unrestrained by further protests.

Apologies may be due for saying so much, or indeed for saying anything of what may seem a trifle; but it is not a trifle when a man of the severest delicacy and refinement of nature is accused by a responsible writer of one of the vulgarest forms of assumption. Still more brutal—it could not well be more baseless—is the accusation made by Mr Cordy Jeaffreson,

and unfortunately accepted to some extent by Mr Leslie Stephen. Put in its briefest form the accusation is this—that when Hunt went out to Italy there was a distinct understanding that he should continue to edit the *Examiner*, so as to insure the support of that journal for the new magazine, and that therefore in abandoning his post he was guilty of a scandalous and unscrupulous breach of faith. It will hardly be believed that the only foundation for this monstrous charge is a casual statement by Trelawny that Lord Byron's loss of interest in the *Liberal* was largely the result of his discovery that Hunt on leaving England had severed his connection with the *Examiner*; and even this statement, which has been so shamefully elaborated, is clearly incorrect—not that Trelawny wilfully misrepresented the facts, but that his information was imperfect or his memory defective. Byron, in his letters to friends in England, had much to say about the Hunts, and made the most of all kinds of trivial or imaginary grievances: it is simply incredible that had a grievance of such reality and magnitude as this really existed he would have refrained from mentioning it. He does, however, so refrain, and for most people of common-sense this fact would

be enough; for it is clear that if Byron had shown that there was even *primâ facie* ground for such a charge against Hunt it would have been a complete justification of himself. But Byron's letters provide positive as well as negative testimony to the absurdity of the calumny. In a letter written in September, 1822, when Hunt had been some months in Italy, he distinctly says, 'I believe the brothers Hunt to be honest men'; and during the following month he writes, 'As to any community of thought, feeling or opinion between Leigh Hunt and me, there is little or none. We meet rarely, hardly ever, but *I think him a good-principled and able man*, and must do as I would be done by.' It is surely needless to point out that Lord Byron would not have spoken of Hunt as 'honest' and 'good-principled' had he himself been the recent victim of a breach of faith such as that which we owe to the fertile imagination of Mr Cordy Jeaffreson. After such conclusive evidence, it is work of supererogation to add that in the letters of Shelley arranging for Hunt's visit to Italy there is no hint of the alleged misunderstanding, or to suggest the obvious absurdity of the idea that in the year 1822 a weekly newspaper in London could be con-

ducted successfully, or at all, by an editor in Pisa or Genoa.

But enough of this. Such a discussion is always irritating, and it is a scandal to literature that it should ever be necessary. It is pleasant to leave these wrangles for a necessarily brief glance at Hunt's laborious, anxious, but always brave and cheerful life in England. In events, other than personal and domestic ones, it was poor; in work, in love, and in honour it was rich indeed. He had his share of quiet home joys; he had, perhaps, more than his share of home sorrows; but for due account of these we must needs refer readers to the *Autobiography* and the *Correspondence*. Since the severance of his connection with the *Examiner* he had left the readers of the political world to wander at their own sweet, or bitter, will. This retirement from the arena of political strife to the flowery meads of literature, where Whigs and Tories can lie down together, did much to bring to an end literary animosities which had their origin in party antagonism; and Christopher North, who had been one of Hunt's fiercest assailants, confessed that by the mere force of genius and geniality, the 'Cockney poet' had triumphed. 'The animosities,' he

exclaimed, with that impulsive generosity of his, 'are mortal, but the humanities live for ever,' and then went on to indulge in a fine panegyric upon *Leigh Hunt's London Journal*, which he declared lay weekly upon his breakfast table, 'like a spot of sunshine dazzling the snow.'

The greater part of the work of these later years consisted of criticism—that special kind of criticism of which Hunt was one of the first and best masters, and which is not an application of rigidly defined canons, but rather a spontaneous expression of appreciation for those things which appealed to a sense of beauty at once delicate and catholic. This criticism often took the form of brief papers, sometimes of more elaborate productions, such as *The Book of the Sonnet* and *A Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla*; and while celebrating the poets whom he loved, his own muse was not forsaken, for much of his most graceful and winning verse sprang into being during these years of toil. Then, too, there were such pleasant books of historical and topographical gossip as *The Town* and *The Old Court Suburb*, to say nothing of other attempts and achievements 'that weighed not as his work yet swelled the

man's amount.' Of the quality of all that was done in these crowded years I must say a word or two before I close: its mere quantity may well be a theme for wondering remark; and when we remember that it was work produced by one whose health was never strong, and who was pressed down by pecuniary and domestic anxieties, it is impossible to regard without admiration that warms into affection, such unremitting industry, such quiet courage, such heroic serenity and cheerfulness.

When the end came it found Hunt in harness. He had gone to visit a relative at Putney, not far from his humble but pleasant Hammersmith home, and had taken with him the materials for work. His work, however, was done, and on the 28th of August, 1859, he received the call to rest, which he obeyed with that quiet, contented faith, that simple natural piety, which had sustained him through the troubles of a more than ordinarily troubled life. With him passed away not only a typical man of letters, to whom every lover of literature must award the tribute of an ungrudging admiration, but a brave, gentle and loyal spirit, whose memory must be peculiarly dear to those who are touched and won by things lovely and of good report. To most of

that which constituted the grace and beauty of Hunt's character scant justice has been done in the preceding pages, for the simple reason that a dismal necessity has largely filled them with answers to the miserable calumnies by which he has been assailed. The mere existence of those calumnies places an appreciator of Hunt at an unfair disadvantage, for when a man is made the object of persistent attack on the part of those who seem disinterested critics the uninformed 'reading public' is apt to think that the attacks must at any rate have some justification. It is high time, both in the interests of humanity and literature, to show that in Hunt's case at least there was *no* justification, and this is a tardy attempt to perform with unsatisfactory brevity a task which ought to have been performed long ago.

Curiously enough, the blow which has, perhaps, been most damaging to Hunt's fair fame was dealt unwittingly by the hand of a friend who loved and honoured him. In an unfortunate hour Charles Dickens conceived the idea of giving a bright life-likeness to one of his most despicable creations by investing him with a certain atmosphere of gay sentiment, and by attributing to him certain tricks of manner

which were generally recognised as Hunt's; the not unnatural consequence being that the real Hunt was proclaimed to be the original—in morals as well as in manner—of the imaginary Harold Skimpole. It is true that as soon as this miserable 'canard' reached the ears of Charles Dickens he published in *Household Words* an earnest, unreserved and almost tearful repudiation; but the mischief had been done, for thousands had read the novel and heard the story who knew nothing of the writer's just and generous vindication of his dead friend. Even a writer to whom reference has already been made, and to whom the fact can hardly be unknown, has dared to apply the name of Skimpole to the man whom the creator of Skimpole regarded with the warmest affection and the profoundest respect.

But Charles Dickens was only a single member of a veritable troop of friends; his voice was only one among many raised to do honour in life and in death to this fine, gentle spirit. Mr Ireland—himself one of the truest of Hunt's friends—has collected a number of these tributes to Hunt's character and genius, and among the tributaries we find names such as those of Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose beautiful descrip-

tion of Leigh Hunt in his old age we all remember; Edmund Ollier, Lord Macaulay, William Hazlitt, Judge Talfourd, R. H. Horne (the author of 'Orion'), Miss Mitford, John Forster, and Mr James Russell Lowell, who vie with each other in doing homage to the man and the writer. To these may be added the loyal and generous reference of Charles Lamb in his memorable letter to Southey, one of the most simple and touching passages even in the writings of 'Elia,' which are so full of such. One other he does add, and it is perhaps the weightiest; for its writer was not, as we know too well, given to words of genial praise. When Hunt's pecuniary anxieties had reached a climax, and an attempt—which proved successful—was being made to secure him a pension of £200 a year from the funds of the Civil List, Thomas Carlyle wrote certain 'Memoranda concerning Mr Leigh Hunt,' from which may be transcribed a few decisive sentences :

'That Mr Leigh Hunt is a man of most indisputably superior worth; a man of genius in a very strict sense of that word, and in all the senses which it bears or implies; of brilliant varied gifts, of clearness, lovingness, truthfulness; of child-like open character; also of most

pure, and even exemplary, private deportment; a man who can be other than loved only by those who have not seen him, or seen him from a distance through a false medium.

\* \* \* \* \*

‘That he is heavily laden with domestic burdens, more heavily than most men, and his economical resources are gone from him. For the last twelve years he has toiled continually, with passionate diligence, with the cheerfullest spirit, refusing no task; yet hardly able, with all this, to provide for the day that was passing over him; and now, after some two years of incessant effort in a new enterprise that seemed of good promise, it also has suddenly broken down; and he remains in weak health, age creeping on him, without employment, means, or outlook, in a situation of the painfulest sort. Neither do his distresses, nor did they at any time, arise from wastefulness or the like, on his own part (he is a man of humble wishes, and can live with dignity upon little); but from crosses of what is called fortune, from injustice of other men, from inexperience of his own, and a guileless trustfulness of nature: the thing and things that have made him unsuccessful make him in

reality *more* loveable, and plead for him in the minds of the candid.

‘That such a man is rare in a nation, and of high value there; not to be *procured* for a whole nation’s revenue, or recovered when taken from us; and some £200 a year is the price at which this one, whom we now have, is valued at.’

When a man like Carlyle speaks from his very heart he is a bold man who would dare to speak after him. Indeed to some of us it is difficult to speak of Leigh Hunt at all, save in language which sets at defiance the ordinary reticences of literature. There are writers who inspire us with unbounded enthusiasm of mere admiration, but who stir in us no intimate and personal emotion; there are others the very mention of whose names evokes an answering thrill of outgoing affection. It is to the latter class that Leigh Hunt belongs; he is primarily, and above all things, the friend of our heart, and he has won his right to a place among our loved ones, not by this or by that quality—by his utter unworldliness, his quick sympathy, or by his disinterested enthusiasm—but by the victorious winningness of his entire personality: he is dear, not because he *had* one beautiful gift, or many beautiful gifts, but because he *was* Leigh Hunt.

Of the many charms of Hunt's writings, perhaps the most powerful is the personal accent which brings the writer near to us. It seems strange at first sight that we should feel this with regard to a man whose work was so largely critical, for the traditional view of criticism is that it is something essentially abstract and *unhuman*—not to say *inhuman*—but the very thing which makes Leigh Hunt a memorable worker in this field of literature is that in his hands criticism became vascular and alive, a thing of flesh and blood. Professor Dowden, in a sentence which would have, in itself, endeared him to Hunt, has said that 'the best criticism . . . is not that which comes out of profound cogitation, but out of immense enjoyment; and the most valuable critic is the critic who communicates sympathy by an exquisite record of his own delights, not the critic who attempts to communicate thought.' This is a penetratively truthful utterance, but long before the truth had been formulated by Mr Dowden, it had been vindicated by the practice of Leigh Hunt. His criticism was, indeed, the outcome of an immense enjoyment, and we feel that this enjoyment has been at once the primary and the most powerful im-

pulse to expression. It is because he enjoys, and because he expresses his enjoyment with such naïveté, that he almost compels us, by a gracious compulsion, to enjoy with him; and our debt to Hunt is the debt we owe to one who has multiplied indefinitely our purest and most super-sensuous delights, and, while multiplying them, has given to each of them a new and peculiar poignancy.

There are no doubt many portions of Hunt's work which lack what one may call the classical note. It was inevitable that it should be thus. He often had to write hastily, under pressure not of the spirit within but of the necessity without; and even when the pressure was of the true kind—the pressure of inspiration—this very fact engendered a certain impulsive, uncalculating eagerness of utterance hardly compatible with that nice perfectness of phrase which Hunt valued so much in others, but which he may have felt in his heart might be won at too great a sacrifice of something better. We may smile—indeed many of us have often smiled—at the utterly prosaic and fatuous criticisms, by Mr Macvey Napier, of Hunt's contributions to the *Edinburgh Review*; but, as the common phrase has it, there was

'something in them,' by which we mean that there was *this* in them—that Hunt's style would at times be found irritating by one to whom the mint, anise, and cummin of expression were everything, the weightier matter of adequacy nothing. For Hunt *is* adequate: he does say what he had to say, not hint at it blunderingly; his rendering of his thought and emotion may at times be careless, but it is always complete.

Still it is to be doubted whether it is as a critic that Hunt would have best cared to be remembered. Poetry was his first, his last, his most constant love; and if by prose he had to win the meat and the raiment of life it was poetry that to him was life itself. In one respect—and sufficient note has hardly been taken of it—Hunt's place is a singularly high one, for he is among the originators. Readers who have studied these poems of Hunt which had been published before the appearance of *Endymion* can hardly fail to recognise that to him Keats owed much of what has often been regarded as most distinctly his own; and a man of whom it can be truly said that he influenced Keats is a man of whom it can be said as truly that he has influenced the whole course of English poetry since Keats was laid in his Italian

grave. But, however this may be, those who admire and love the poetry of Hunt need not be afraid of allowing him to be judged by his own achievement without thought of any such side issue. Even among poets who are poets beyond all doubt, we recognise some as specially poetical poets, and Hunt is one of these. He is never supreme in the way that some poets are supreme, and even on his own level, he is at one time less felicitous than at another; but there is one thing in which he never fails—that imaginative glow and warmth which takes us into another world than the prosaic life of every day, and enables us to forget the dulnesses and the meannesses of the actual. Whatever else it may lack, his work never lacks gusto—the sense and expression of quick keen delight in all things naturally and wholesomely delightful. To us who are familiar with the heated tones of some contemporary verse it may seem almost ludicrous that such an instinctively stainless poem as ‘The Story of Rimini’ should have been considered to be in some way an offence against the ordered proprieties of life; but the fact is that Hunt had a singular healthfulness, and therefore a singular purity, which enabled him to handle worthily and with a sweet wholesome simplicity of touch

themes which in the hands of coarser or more self-conscious men would inevitably catch some glow of unwholesome voluptuousness or hint of subtle pruriency. We know what the age of the Regency was, and we can imagine how difficult it was for the average man of the world in that age to conceive the possibility of treating with absolute purity—purity that was instinctive and unconscious of itself—a subject which in any way lent itself to grossness or suggestiveness of expatiation. Hunt, however, though in the age was not of it. The companions of his spirit were Petrarch, Chaucer, Spenser; and in the *Una* of the last named poet who rode upon the lion we have an imaginative type of the passionately pure genius of Hunt. No most solicitous mother of any carefully nurtured English girl need look with even a momentary glance of suspicion upon any line written by this stainless soul; and the guarantee for her confidence is not to be found in any of Hunt's opinions or convictions, but in the fact that his nature was not one in which anything but the sweet and the innocent could live.

Hunt's mission among English poets was to be a celebrator of the beauty and gladness of nature and of human life, and to the Puritan

element, which has as yet hardly worn out of the English character, beauty is a temptation and gladness a snare. But this feeling is a result of intellectual action—of considering too curiously—and Hunt's was a nature framed for fine emotion and keen sensation rather than for ethical or other considering. He simply turned instinctively to the sun in whatever region of sky or home the sun might be, and it is little wonder that the sunlight is reflected in his verse. A sunny spirit—that is the true name for Leigh Hunt. His sky indeed was often clouded, but he waited cheerfully and hopefully for the clouds to pass away; and when now and then he touches some sad theme he dwells most insistently, not upon the sadness itself, but upon that element of beauty which adheres in all sadness which is not ignoble. He was a good man: he was also, in spite of troubles which would have crushed the heart out of most of us, a happy man; and it is impossible for any spirit who has been 'finely touched' to be long in his company without being consciously both better and happier. It is difficult to leave him, but the parting must come. Let it be brief. Beloved Leigh Hunt, *Ave atque vale!*

## THE POETRY OF COMMON SENSE

CHARLES KINGSLEY, in one of his vigorous essays, speaks mournfully of the time 'when Pope and plain sense went out and Shelley and the seventh heaven came in.' The tone of complaint seems at the first blush somewhat unreasonable, for the coming in of the seventh heaven is surely a desirable event in a world where even a heaven of lower rank is not always very easily discernible. Celestial qualities either in life or in literature must needs be valuable; but like more commonplace valuables, they offer a strong temptation to counterfeiting experts, and it is better to have in one's pocket an honest brown penny than a pinchbeck sovereign. It can hardly be doubted by anybody that a good deal of pinchbeck coin is at present in circulation. Pope's bronze of plain sense may be described in Kantian phraseology as the

wisdom of the Understanding, born of commonplace observation and reflection; the celestial auriferous-looking coinage now in greater favour, is supposed to be the wisdom of that higher reason which comes of direct vision—vision that is free from the tiresome necessity of explaining and justifying its own processes. But, as the poet remarks, ‘things are not what they seem,’—at least not always. Wilful and perverse whimsicality is occasionally presented to us as the precious harvest of insight, and the false meaning or no meaning of this Brummagem insight is judiciously veiled by a style to which, because it is generally deficient in lucidity and not infrequently in grammar, we award such praise as is conveyed by one or other of the fashionable terms of eulogy. It is a fact that the expression of the highest truth—the truth of Reason—may sometimes look like nonsense when surveyed from the lower plane of the Understanding; but the study of much contemporary literature, especially in the domains of poetry and criticism, tends to convince the student that in the creed of the modern young man of letters the fact is stated conversely, thus: ‘Whatever is apparently nonsense must be accepted as the highest truth.’

Of course we are not left without writers who can think clearly and strongly, and who can clothe their thoughts in a well-fitting and graceful vesture of language which renders adequately its every outline; but it can hardly be said that the work of these writers represents the mass of our current literature in the same way that the work of such men as Pope and Johnson represented the current literature of their century. Pope and Johnson stood above the crowd in virtue of qualities which were incommunicable; but they and the crowd had a common standard of excellence, and if this standard were not the highest, it was at any rate better than no standard at all. Correctness in following models approved by a general agreement of cultivated opinion may not be the noblest literary virtue; but it is a virtue which betokens a state of intellectual civilisation, because it is an acknowledgment of a central authority; whereas, on the other hand, the dethronement of what is understood to be correctness in favour of a so-called originality—the divine right to say anything anyhow—is not an advance but a distinct retrogression, a lapse from civilisation into anarchy.

Kingsley, in making his point, had recourse to ‘apt alliteration’s artful aid,’ a rhetorical

expedient employed by other point-makers before and since his time; but, in his epigrammatic utterance, sound which strikes, and significance which satisfies, fit each other more closely and neatly than usual. Shelley is really the best representative of the poetry of a cloud-wrapped, invisible, seventh heaven, the poetry of 'the desire of the moth for the star,' of an attempt at the expression of the inexpressible, the attainment of the unattainable. Pope is not less truly a typical poet of plain sense, content with the imaginative sustenance and emotional stimulation of the familiar harvest of earth's cornfields and vineyards, which yields wholesome flour to his flail and wine to his press. Wherever one opens his pages one finds some final literary embodiment of what has been described as the wisdom of the Understanding; but a very just appreciation of the kind and quality of his work as an imaginative exponent of this wisdom may be arrived at without straying beyond those two very characteristic poems, the *Essay on Man* and the *Essay on Criticism*.

One feels specially with regard to the former poem what one so often feels with regard to some real or supposed masterpiece of literature,

—how interesting it would be to read for the first time without having previously read one of the many words written by the critics concerning it. It has been urged by writers of the rank of De Quincey, Mr Leslie Stephen, and Mr Lowell, that its thought is borrowed from Bolingbroke; that the philosophical system expounded in it lacks unity, and that one position is, indeed, inconsistent with another; that it is illogical, shallow, ill-digested, and I know not what besides. Now all these charges are more or less true, and if but one of them were true the *Essay on Man* would be deprived of claims to honour as a systematic philosophical statement. But this is just what it is not,—just what it cannot be, unless it is to abandon all right to be considered a poem. Pope's poetry is the poetry of the Understanding; but an orderly logical essay on Man, with all its parts so well and calmly thought out in relation to each other that there should be no inconsistency or flaw in the chain of reasoning, would be the mere prose of the Understanding. We are easily misled by names, and the essay being a recognised prose form, we yield to the temptation to judge by prose canons any composition bearing that name. Perhaps there is no fact

which tells so much in favour of an affirmative answer to the old question of the debating societies, 'Was Pope a poet?' than his obvious inability to produce metrical work, which, when judged by these canons, is at all satisfactory. The *Essay on Man* is not an essay at all, in so far as that term involves logical as well as literary continuity; it is really a collection of short reflective and epigrammatic poems, the welding together of which into a larger poem,—with an apparent rather than a real unity—is mechanical, not vital. Thus, in the *Essay on Man* the parts are greater than the whole; and Pope, as represented by this and similar works, is one of the few poets to whom no injustice, but rather the fullest justice, is done by the process of reproduction in what used to be called Elegant Extracts.

Of the single lines which, in becoming popular proverbial expressions, have received the world's testimonial to their penetrating truth of thought and final perfectness of expression it is needless to speak, though it may be remarked that their combination of compactness with clearness is, broadly speaking, unknown to the literature of our own day, and, if we may judge from what we read, is not even regarded as a

desirable ideal. Of the longer detachable passages which are, in a manner, complete in themselves, and which I have ventured to speak of as poems, it has been said again and again that the thought in them is trite and obvious. It would be foolhardy to affirm that this is never the case; but, even when it is so, it must be remembered that the world owes a debt of gratitude not merely to the man who provides what are called new ideas, but to him who crystallises old thought, with which in solution people have long been familiar, into some enduring jewel of language. There is always something admirable and deserving in literature instinct with that quality of which Pope wrote the memorable couplet :—

‘ True wit is nature to advantage dressed,  
What oft was thought but ne’er so well expressed.’

It may, however, be questioned whether Pope’s intellectual substance is really so thin as it is often assumed to be. The master of utterance has the power of so presenting a new or profound thought that we appropriate it at once, and the appropriation is so effortless that we are tempted to believe it has always been ours—that because we see it so clearly now, we have always

seen it with equal clearness. On the other hand, the thought which we take home with difficulty acquires a factitious value from the labour spent in its acquisition, for it is not in human nature to prize lightly what it has cost so much to win. I would not even seem to depreciate the noble work of Robert Browning; but I think any fair-minded admirer will admit that an important element in his estimate of the poet's thought is his consciousness that he has made it his own by working for it, and that if he had not worked for it, it could never have been his.

And this mention of Browning tempts me to note the fact that one of his most striking central ideas was really anticipated, and anticipated not vaguely and tentatively but with singular force and distinctness, by the poet with whom he seems to have so little in common. The idea as it appears in numerous poems of Browning may be briefly stated thus:—Man is a being created for two lives, a finite life and an infinite life, and if he will live wisely he will neither ignore the latter in the enjoyment of the former, nor commit the opposite error of attempting to snatch at the fulness of the infinite life while yet subject to the bonds of the

finite—to 'crowd into time eternity's concern.' This is the thought which pervades with weighty warning such poems as *Paracelsus*, *Sordello*, and *Easter-Day*—with stimulating appeal such other poems as *A Grammarian's Funeral* and *Rabbi Ben Ezra*; it is indeed one of the most frequent of Browning's germinal ideas, and is often referred to as something peculiarly his own. He has, doubtless, largely made it so by characteristic treatment; but in another form, less impressive indeed but more sharply outlined than the dramatic, it is certainly present in the *Essay on Man*. After an argument which may be left to the tender mercies of the logical critics, Pope arrives at the conclusion that in the universe of being :—

'tis plain,  
There must be, somewhere, such a rank as Man :  
And all the question (wrangle e'er so long)  
Is only this, if God has placed him wrong ?'

To this question Pope's optimistic theism can give but one reply, and it is in the course of this reply—from which a few passages must be quoted—that he unfolds the thought of man's limitations and possibilities.

' Then say not Man's imperfect, Heaven in fault;  
Say rather, Man's as perfect as he ought :

His knowledge measured to his state and place,  
 His time a moment, and a point his space.  
 If to be perfect in a certain sphere,  
 What matter, soon or late, or here or there.

\* \* \* \*

‘ In Pride, in reas’ning Pride, our error lies;  
 All quit their sphere, and rush into the skies ;  
 Pride still is aiming at the blest abodes,  
 Men would be Angels, Angels would be Gods.

\* \* \* \*

‘ The bliss of Man (could Pride that blessing find),  
 Is not to act or think beyond mankind;  
 No pow’rs of body or of soul to share,  
 But what his nature or his state can bear.’

It is needless to adduce parallels, but it will be seen that the thought of Pope is really one with the thought of Browning; and if its expression by the earlier poet seem less impressive than that of our own contemporary, the comparative lack of impressiveness is to be found, not in the thought itself, but in the form of expression which has become to us old-fashioned, flat, and destitute of its primal charm.

What Pope has to say concerning the relation of passion to conduct is hardly less noteworthy. The passions, uncontrolled by reason or conscience, have forced so many men into folly, or vice, or crime, that the first thought of the

average man is to regard them as necessarily enemies of virtue, and the reasoning, restraining faculties as necessarily its allies. This was certainly the ordinary view of the eighteenth century, its moral ideal being the conception of a man whose passions were always held in subjection. It is, indeed, the ordinary view even yet, and many a man and woman of to-day has felt the delightful shock of a new and illuminating truth in reading the words of Professor Seeley—"No heart is pure that is not passionate; no virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic,"—or those other words of Rabbi Ben Ezra,

‘Let us not always say,  
Spite of this flesh to-day  
“I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!”  
As the bird wings and sings,  
Let us cry, “All good things  
Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more now than flesh helps  
soul.”’

How fresh this seems—how full of the sweet, sharp breath of the new day! but here, too, Pope after his own fashion has been first in the field. To him the fixity of virtue boasted of by the mere stoic is but a fixity like that of frost. ‘Strength of mind,’ he says, ‘is exercise not rest,’ and while on the ocean of life over which we are all sailing reason is the card which

guides, passion is the gale which sends the ship bounding over the billows to the haven where she would be.

‘Nor God alone in the still calm we find,  
He mounts the storm, and walks upon the wind.’

Everyone knows the passage which sets forth and illustrates Pope’s theory of a ruling passion as a motive power of conduct; and it is this passion to which he refers in the lines which, it will be seen, bear a curious resemblance, not merely in thought but in phraseology, to the passages quoted from Professor Seeley and Browning.

‘Th’ Eternal Art, educing good from ill,  
Grafts on this Passion our best principle :  
‘Tis thus the Mercury of Man is fixed,  
*Strong grows the Virtue with his nature mix’d ;*  
The dross cements what else were too refin’d,  
*And in one interest body acts with mind.*  
As fruits, ungrateful to the planter’s care,  
On savage stocks inserted, learn to bear;  
*The surest Virtues thus from Passions shoot,*  
Wild Nature’s vigour working at the root.’

There is no need to press Pope’s claims too vehemently, or to urge them with exaggeration of emphasis; but surely it is bare justice to say that those who accuse him of merely superficial thinking raise a suspicion that they themselves

have been guilty of hasty and careless reading. Nor can they justify their charge by the plea that Pope simply versified the thought of Bolingbroke. What is the explanation of the fact that to-day, though Pope is not read as he ought to be read, the readers of the *Essay on Man* are numbered by thousands, while readers of Bolingbroke,—one of the most brilliant writers of English prose—are numbered by units? No explanation is possible but this,—that Pope, though he may not have originated the intellectual substance of the *Essay* has given to it the finally satisfying expression; and this he could not have done by merely translating it from prose into verse, but only by thinking it, as it were, over again, for no one can rightly utter the thought that he has not made his own.

There was no Bolingbroke behind the *Essay on Criticism*, but it is not less rich than the *Essay on Man* in the ripe fruit of plain sense, the unpretentious but practical wisdom of the Understanding. Open the poem almost anywhere, and we see how Pope goes straight to the heart of the matter in hand, how he says just the true thing in the best possible way, and therefore the final way. No question, for

example, has been more fiercely discussed than this—Is Art to be judged by the measure of its truth to Nature as Nature is observed by the individual artist, or by the measure of its conformity to certain traditions of fitness which long *prestige* has rendered classical? We should expect Pope to take his cue from the conventional spirit of his age which was dominated by Renaissance influences; but as a matter of fact his verdict is in favour both of the direct study of Nature and of loyalty to classical traditions of Art, because he sees that the two are really one.

‘First follow Nature, and your judgment frame  
By her just standard, which is still the same :  
Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,  
One clear, unchanged, and universal light,  
Life, force, and beauty must to all impart,  
At once the source, and end, and test of Art.’

‘Nature the source and end and test of Art’ might have served as a motto for the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a justification for all their eccentricities and rebellions. But Pope would not have been a Pre-Raphaelite, for this is not his last word.

‘Those Rules of old discover’d, not devised,  
Are Nature still, but Nature methodiz’d;

Nature, like liberty, is but restrain'd  
By the same laws which first herself ordain'd.'

\* \* \* \*

'When first young Maro in his boundless mind  
A work t'outlast immortal Rome design'd,  
Perhaps he seem'd above the critic's law,  
And but from Nature's fountains scorned to draw :  
But when t'examine every part he came,  
Nature and Homer were, he found, the same.'

These rules, these great examples, must, however, be to the poet (for it is the poet of whom Pope is mainly writing) as guide-posts, indicating generally the way he should go; not as walls compelling him to tread undeviatingly the beaten track. Those are graces which no methods can teach, because they come not by foresight but by fortune; lucky licenses which disown authority but which, in virtue of their success, become authorities themselves; glorious offences of 'great wits' who :—

'From vulgar bounds with grave disorder part,  
And snatch a grace beyond the reach of art,  
Which, without passing thro' the judgment, gains  
The heart, and all its end at once attains.'

This is really as profound as it is pellucid; not one whit less profound in its way than the

illuminating words of Polixenes in *The Winter's Tale* :—

'Yet nature is made better by no mean  
But nature makes that mean; so, o'er that art  
Which you say adds to nature, is an art  
That nature makes.

This is an art

Which does not mend nature, change it rather, but  
The art itself is nature.'

In both passages we see common sense at its highest—the wisdom of the Understanding which discriminates and compares, rising into the wisdom of the Reason which sees. Even, however, when it remains on its lower levels among the most familiar simplicities of observation or reflection, it always leaves behind it the satisfaction given by adequacy of accomplishment. Indeed it is not distinguished from other poetry by choice of theme or even in the strictest sense of the word by treatment of theme; it is poetry which is found wherever the poet—be his matter or manner what it may—estimates fairly the possibilities of expression existing in himself, and the possibilities of being expressed which exist in his subject.

Kingsley thought of Pope as pre-eminently the poet of plain sense, and Dryden, Johnson, Goldsmith, Crabbe and Cowper, whose manner is in

varying degrees akin to Pope's, are not less entitled to the designation; but the fact that these men belong to one literary school may easily betray the unwary into a specious error of intellectual grouping. They represent what is called, perhaps not very accurately, the classical manner of feeling and handling; whereas Shelley and his school represent the manner which is known as romantic; but the controversy between the adherents of 'plain sense' and the devotees of the 'seventh heaven' is not one with the weary and interminable controversy between classicism and romanticism. The questions to be asked before deciding whether a writer belongs to the sensible or pseudo-celestial order of poets are not 'Does he write in the trim couplets of Pope, or in the bounding lyrical measures of Shelley?' 'Does he celebrate Nature conventionalised or Nature free?' 'Is his philosophy the philosophy of pedestrian empiricism or of soaring transcendentalism?' but, 'Have his conceptions, be they lofty or lowly, the coherent sanity of substance which alone lends itself to clear presentation in a satisfying artistic form?' and 'Are such conceptions within or beyond his reach; does he dominate them or is he dominated by them?' Matthew Arnold has observed that

Keats *renders* Nature, while Shelley *tries to render* her. With the truth of the special criticism I have no immediate concern; but the words are cited because they indicate with such clear conciseness the essential difference between two classes of poetic craftsmen. It is this perfection of rendering—whether of nature or of human life, of thought, sentiment or emotion—which makes such a term as ‘poet of plain sense’ a term of absolute praise, instead of being like classical or romantic, subjective or objective, an epithet which may be used either by way of eulogy or of reproach. Mr W. M. Rossetti, for example, depreciates Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner* on the ground that he finds it ‘defective in the core of common sense,’ and while the finding may possibly be questioned, every judicious reader will feel that if it be admitted the verdict of depreciation based upon it is perfectly just; for by deficiency in common sense the writer means a lack of that organic coherence of substance which is as essential to the conviction of the imagination as is sound logic to the conviction of the reason. Such a lack is not merely a defect from this or that point of view—it is a defect from any point of view—a fault in itself.

The opposite merit is to be found not only

in the classical didactics of Pope, Dryden, and the earlier Georgians but in the romantic narrative and descriptive poetry of Byron and Scott; it is not wanting in the meditatively observant work of Wordsworth. It is not necessary in order to praise the poetry of common sense consistently, that we should prefer the work of the eighteenth century to that of the men who are nearer to our own time—work which necessarily comes home to us because it speaks our own thought in our own dialect. When Kingsley spoke of the dominating quality of Pope's verse as having gone out, he meant that it had gone out of fashion, not that it had gone out of existence, for a cardinal intellectual virtue does not perish with the men of any generation;—‘the poetry of *sense*,’ to adapt a line of Keats’ ‘is never dead.’ Just at the present, more's the pity, Byron and Scott are largely sharing the fate of Pope—they have gone out; and we have been told again and again that their loss of vogue is due to the absence from their work of a certain exquisiteness of apprehension, a subtilty of sensation, a mastery of complexities of *technique*, of all those vague virtues of conception and treatment which are summed up in the one blessed word ‘dis-

inction.' These things are certainly not to be discerned in *Childe Harold* or *The Lady of the Lake*, but one has a shrewd suspicion that what is found amiss in these poems by the noisiest class of contemporary connoisseurs is not the absence of something, but the presence of something else—of that fine manly robustness, that sturdy directness, that simple instinctive swiftness of touch which embodies a clear and vivid conception in a perfectly representative literary form that stands a silent reproach to the ineffective prettiness, the oracular obscurity and the convulsive strain of the verse which, because it can never touch or move the normally constituted human being, is on the principle of *lucus a non lucendo*, spoken of as 'intimate.'

This intimacy is supposed to be specially manifest in the treatment of Nature by contemporary poets of the seventh heaven; and in their verse Nature is certainly exploited as she has never been exploited before. She has become a Diana pursued to her most private haunts by a literary Actæon with note-book in hand; but the notes that he makes give one the impression of being the jottings of an eavesdropper, not the confidences of a favoured lover. Even in Pope's *Windsor Forest*, with all its

conventional phraseology, one is conscious of a simple, more instinctive, and therefore more genuine enjoyment of Nature than is to be found in the work of certain living poets, who have, indeed, abjured convention for cram. Where, now, it may be asked, save here and there in the work of poets like Lord Tennyson, Browning, and Matthew Arnold, do we read poetry which brings us into such veritable touch with the life of the elements as that of which we are made conscious by the virile stanzas of Byron?

‘ All heaven and earth are still—though not in sleep,  
 But breathless, as we grow when feeling most;  
 And silent, as we stand in thoughts too deep :  
 All heaven and earth are still : From the high host  
 Of stars, to the lull’d lake and mountain-coast,  
 All is concenter’d in a life intense  
 Where not a beam, nor air, nor leaf is lost  
 But hath a part of being, and a sense,  
 Of that which is of all Creator and defence.

\* \* \* \*

The sky is changed !—and such a change ! Oh night,  
 And storm, and darkness, ye are wondrous strong.  
 Yet lovely in your strength as is the light  
 Of a dark eye in woman ! Far along,  
 From peak to peak, the rattling crags among  
 Leaps the live thunder ! Not from one lone cloud,  
 But every mountain now hath found a tongue,  
 And Jura answers, through her misty shroud,  
 Back to the joyous Alps, who call to her aloud !’

Such pictorial description as this, producing its effects so simply, so directly, is, not less than the measured epigrammatic didacticism of Pope, the poetry of common sense; because diverse as are their indwelling spirit and their outward form, they both exhibit the calm supremacy of fulfilled accomplishment, not the contortion of ineffectual strain. We have fine didactic poetry now that is very different from the didactic poetry of Pope and Johnson, having less of glitter and more of warmth, fewer of the accents of the world, more of the inspired tone of solitary vision; but it has the same notes of clearness, simplicity, sufficingness. These are heard in Arnold's stanza,—

‘We cannot kindle when we will  
 The fire that in the heart resides ;  
 The spirit bloweth and is still,  
 In mystery our soul abides.  
     But tasks in hours of insight will’d  
     Can be through hours of gloom fulfill’d.’

They are heard yet again in the lines of *In Memoriam*,—

‘Let knowledge grow from more to more,  
     But more of reverence in us dwell;  
     That mind and soul according well  
 May make one music as before  
 But vaster.’

Nor are they absent from, or inconsistent with, the poetry of a sane and reverent mysticism, which inspires Wordsworth's great *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*; for the poet of plain sense is not the poet who is distinguished from his aspiring peers by being content to dwell in the flat lowlands of thought and emotion, but by his gift of climbing without giddiness, of breathing the air of the higher summits without intoxication. The poetry of common sense is seen at its best and strongest not when imagination plods along the highway, but when it stands upon the mountain top, as in the Homeric Epic, the *Divine Comedy* of Dante, the human tragedy of Shakspeare, the *Paradise Lost* of Milton. In these supreme efforts we are, however, impressed more immediately and forcibly, by the Titanesque power than by the sane and ordered co-ordination of its expression; so therefore, when we name the poetry of common sense, we naturally think of the poetry in which the peculiar quality stands free from the shadow of more splendid if not more essential endowments; and the name which comes to our lips will not be the name of Homer or Shakspeare; it will be some such name as that of Pope. Nor is he unworthy

of the representative position. If it be urged that his substance is too familiar to be arresting, we may fairly ask, who made it familiar? whose stamp it was that gave to common metal such universal currency? The gentleman who went to see *Hamlet* for the first time said that it was 'a good play but too full of quotations.' We laugh at him, and half-an-hour afterwards we ourselves remark with a grave face that Pope's literary merits are considerable, but that his thought is trite and commonplace. Be it so. Sleep is commonplace, but Sancho Panza had the grace to bless the man who invented it. Common sense is not quite so common as it ought to be, but it is nevertheless sufficiently common to be despised by superior people. We will therefore bless the men who have made it common, and among our blessings a special benediction shall be reserved for Alexander Pope.

## ROBERT BUCHANAN AS POET

HAD Mr Robert Buchanan added to his other achievements those of a politician and an orator he would have rivalled the versatility of the first Lord Lytton who was surely the most variously endowed Englishman of his time. Though, like his great contemporary Browning, 'ever a fighter' he has, so far as I know, kept clear of the arena of political conflict, but he has made his mark as poet, novelist, biographer, (his sketch of David Gray is a delightful piece of work) essayist, critic, and playwright; and though it cannot truthfully be said of him that he has touched nothing that he has not adorned, it may surely be declared that in every kind of intellectual labour to which he has put his hand he has, somewhere or other, left an impress which no seeing eye can mistake for anything but the sign manual of genius. And

yet, curiously enough, while Mr Buchanan is essentially a poet and a novelist, playwright, and the rest only, as it were, *par hasard*, the work which is most characteristic, most truly his own, has obtained recognition noticeably scanty when compared with that accorded to the other work which speaks of a talent rather than a personality. His novels good and bad—and he has produced both—have been read by thousands; night after night his plays, which are sometimes little more than creditable journeyman's work, have been greeted with the applause of crowded houses; but his poetry, though it has numerous and warm admirers, cannot be said even yet to have caught the ear of 'the great reading public,'—a fact that is all the more curious because his verse, while by no means devoid of the higher poetical qualities which will always appeal exclusively to the few is peculiarly rich in other qualities which are, in the best sense of the word popular. Yet, strange as it is, it is certainly true that numbers of readers who could stand a fairly rigorous examination in half-a-dozen contemporary poets both of the first and the second rank will confess that Robert Buchanan is known to them only by 'Phil Blood's Leap,'

or possibly also by 'St Abe and his Seven Wives.'

I have spoken of Mr Buchanan's versatility as exhibited in various classes of intellectual endeavour—poems, novels, plays, and so forth; but if he is studied simply as a poet this versatility is no less impressive. Apart from the work of the laureate, no body of contemporary verse presents the same variety of imaginative, emotional and intellectual appeal; and though variety is not in itself a thing of price, it becomes distinctly valuable when it can be recognised as an indication of the fecundity of a richly vitalised nature. Now this is the kind of variety which is distinguishable in the work of Mr Buchanan—the variety which must make itself manifest in the outcome of an impulsive energy which no single conduit of expression suffices to exhaust. His purely lyrical poems—such for example as 'The Fairy Reaper,' 'Spring Song in the City,' and the lyrics in 'White Rose and Red'—are so full of the essential spirit of song as to leave upon the mind of the sensitive reader the impression that the writer is pre-eminently a lyrist—a simple maker of the winning music of melodious verse. Then, while this impression is strong upon him, he turns to

other groups of poems, and finds that though the purely sensuous charm of music is still there, it has taken a subordinate place, and the man who seemed but a singer reveals himself as a dramatic creator, a philosophical mystic, a winning story-weaver, a maker of ballads that have the strength, simplicity and directness belonging to the ballad-work of a less sophisticated day.

The poetry of ecstatic or rapturous song when seen in its perfect and typical form, as for example in the most characteristic verse of Shelley, has the quality or the defect—for to differing moods it may seem either—of a certain unsubstantiality and vagueness of outline, which find their visual correspondence in the aspect of material objects seen through mist or moonlight. When Mr Buchanan's verse is most purely lyrical it approaches this effect, but never quite reaches it; it never quits its hold of the tangible, never lacks the full humanity which is compact of sense and soul in vital combination. The difference is almost too subtle and elusive to be expressed in terms of definition, but its reality will be felt and its nature apprehended by any one who comes fresh from the

wonderful lyric in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*

‘Life of life ! thy lips enkindle’

to any of the ‘Songs of the Veil’ in *The Book of Orm, the Celt*, where Mr Buchanan’s work, so far as outward form is concerned, bears the strongest resemblance to the work of his great predecessor. The later poet can never detach himself from the simple familiarities of human life, and even when the solemn veil is lifted and the divine Face is disclosed he turns from the ineffable vision to the homely world on which the Face looks down.

‘I awoke my body,  
And up the mountains,  
With the sweet sun shining  
I wander’d free,—  
And the hills were pleasant,  
Knee-deep in heather,  
And the yellow eagle  
Wheel’d over me—  
And the streams were flowing,  
And the lambs were leaping  
Merrily.

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‘Hard by I noted  
Little children,  
Toddling and playing  
In a field of hay—

The Face was looking,  
But they were gazing  
At one another,  
    And what cared *they* ?  
But one I noted,  
A little maiden,  
Look'd up o' sudden  
    And ceased her play,  
And she dropt her garland  
And stood upgazing,  
With hair like sunlight,  
    And face like clay.'

Of course this is not quoted as an example of Mr Buchanan's best work, but as an illustration of that instinctive habit of nature which impels him to reach things of spirit through the things of sense, to find in simple familiar humanity an avenue of approach to the unseen and the spiritual. He does not strive to render the mysterious awe of the unveiled Face in the heavens: he shows it reflected in the face of the child on earth.

It is natural that Mr Buchanan should turn most frequently and spontaneously to those kinds of work in which his native bent towards the treatment of the simple humanities has full play. To compare him with Chaucer would be an absurd extravagance; but it is not extravagant to say that since Chaucer we have had no poet

who can be more emphatically described as a poet of flesh and blood. The name of Robert Browning will occur to many as that of a poet to whom the designation would apply, but Browning's men and women are very largely either representatives of exceptional types, or of familiar types placed in an environment which confers on them an unfamiliar interest—generally the kind of interest involved in a somewhat complex moral problem. Mr Buchanan's men and women have more of the primitive simple every day humanity which makes a permanent and universal appeal. Willie Baird, Attorney Sneak, Liz, Nell, Widow Mysie, and the three whose varying loves provide the tragic comedy of *White Rose and Red* are obviously nearer to the common mind and heart than are Bishop Blougram, the Queen of *In a Balcony*, Sordello, and Caponsacchi, highly vitalised as all these creations undoubtedly are. In sheer vividness of presentment the portrait of Widow Mysie the fascinating inn-keeper—sensuous, warm-blooded, cold-hearted and calculating—is a little masterpiece.

'Oh, sweet was Widow Mysie, sweet and sleek !  
The peach's blush and down were on her cheek,  
And there were dimples in her tender chin

For Cupids small to hunt for kisses in;  
Dark glossy were her ringlets, each a prize,  
And wicked, wicked were her beaded eyes,—  
Plump was her figure rounded and complete  
And tender were her tiny tinkling feet !  
All this was nothing to the warmth and light  
That seemed to hover o'er her day and night ;—  
Where'er she moved, she seem'd to soothe and please  
With pleasant murmurs as of bumble bees ;  
Her small plump hands on public missions flew  
Like snow-white doves that flying croon and coo ;  
Her feet fell patter, cheep, like little mice ;  
Her breath was soft with sugar and with spice ;  
And when her fingers—so !—your hand would press  
You tingled to the toes with loveliness,  
While her dark eyes with lessening zone in zone  
Flasht sunlight on the mirrors of your own  
Dazzling your spirit with a wicked sense  
That seems more heavenly-born than innocence.'

This is an example of Mr Buchanan's frankly realistic manner, in which the vigorous effectiveness of his flesh and blood treatment of a selected individual or type is most plainly apparent; but there is not less of rich warm vitality in the portraits painted with more of idealistic, romantic, or—as some would put it—poetic feeling. Such eminently characteristic poems as 'Meg Blane,' 'The Scaith of Bartle,' 'The Glamour,' and 'Poet Andrew' must be studied as wholes; but a few stanzas may be taken from a winning portrait study which has

not, I think, been reprinted from the pages of the *Argosy* where I read it many years ago. It was called 'A London Lyric' and might with propriety have been included in the volume of *London Poems*.

'Bell from the North hath journey'd hither,  
 She brings the scent of heather with her,  
     To show in what sweet glens she grew,—  
 Where'er she treads in any weather,  
 She steps as if she trod on heather,  
     And leaves a sense like dropping dew.

'The mountains own her for their daughter,  
 Her presence feels like running water  
     Cool'd from the sun in a green glade;  
 So strange she seems to city seeing,—  
 A playmate of the winds, a being  
     Made of the dew and mountain shade.

'In the strange street she stops to listen,  
 Her red lips part, her blue eyes glisten,  
     Wild windy voices round her speak;  
 She sees the streets roll dark and clouded,  
 Fearless as when she paused enshrouded  
     By mists upon a mountain peak.

'And oft, while wondrous eyed she wanders,"  
 She meets a sweet face, pauses, ponders,  
     And then peers backward as she goes,—  
 As in the far-off solemn places,  
 She drooped the tenderest of faces  
     Over some tender thing that grows.

' Long have the clouds and winds been by her,  
Long have the waters murmured nigh her,  
    And sweet delight in these hath she ;  
Long has she watched the shapes of wonder  
Darken around with crying thunder,  
    Yet all have used her tenderly.

\* \* \* \*

' When mighty shapes had love and pity,  
What should appal her in the city ?  
    What should she fear in sun or shower ?  
The cloud of life is pleasure-laden,—  
She fears it not,—she is a maiden  
    Familiar with the things of power.

\* \* \* \*

' Yet is she made in mortal fashion,—  
A thing of pureness and of passion,  
    A winning thing of eyes and lips,  
A maiden with a cheek to sigh on,  
A waist to clasp, a heart to die on—  
    Kiss-worthy to the finger-tips !'

The vivid realisation which makes these and a score of other portraits glow with the warmth of life is not less manifest in Mr Buchanan's rendering of nature and in his treatment of incident and situation. No nature-poetry of our time is less subjective than his, or freer from the intrusion of that 'pathetic fallacy' which, fascinating as it often is, denotes, as Mr Ruskin has shown, a lapse from perfect veracity

of imaginative vision. He is doubtless saved from it both by that healthful outwardness of mind which distinguishes the poet of observation and creation from the poet of sentiment and reflection, and partly by his absorbing interest in humanity which impels him to utilise Nature as a background rather than as a theme. The masterly and impressive picture of the great snow in *White Rose and Red*, so rich in rapid touches of detail and yet so broad in general effect, seems at first sight to have been painted for its own sake; but we soon perceive that, whatever be the feeling of the reader, it is to the poet simply, if one may so call it, an expedient—a means to the intensification of the pure human interest by the addition of a new element of terror and pathos to the weary pilgrimage of poor Red Rose to the home of the man who has deserted her. It is so everywhere. Nature is always subsidiary, but whenever its aspects or objects come into the composition as necessary elements they are presented with almost the substance and tangibility of things which appeal directly to the physical sensibilities of sight, hearing and touch. The force of the wind, the emptiness of the sky, the swirl of the sea, the mass of the mountain im-

press us just in that same vivid way that we are impressed by the palpitating humanity of the men and women.

Such endowments as these are pre-eminently the endowments of the balladist; and Mr Buchanan's work has nearly always the ballad feeling, and frequently the ballad form as well. For reasons too obvious to need statement the making of ballads—without the final 'e'—is rapidly becoming a lost art, but Mr Buchanan is one of the very few surviving inheritors of the old tradition. 'The Ballad of Judas Iscariot,' one of its author's most arresting performances, has the directness, simplicity, and glamour of the ancient work, but the intellectual or spiritual conception which dominates it belongs to our own day, and therefore with all its power and beauty it is hardly so representative as are some of Mr Buchanan's other achievements in this manner. 'The Lights of Leith' might, however, be a genuine antique, and it may be worth noting that it was the predecessor by some years of Rossetti's noble poem 'The King's Tragedy,' the only contemporary ballad with which it can properly be compared.

"The lights o' Leith ! the lights o' Leith !"  
The skipper cried aloud—

While the wintry gale with snow and hail  
Blew snell thro' sail and shroud.

"The lights o' Leith ! the lights o' Leith !"  
As he paced the deck cried he—  
"How merrily bright they burn this night  
Thro' the reek o' the stormy sea !"

'As the ship ran in thro' the surging spray  
Afire seemed all the town ;  
They saw the glare from far away,  
And safely steer'd to the land-locked bay,  
They cast their anchor down.

"'Tis sure a feast in the town o' Leith,"  
(To his mate the skipper spoke),  
"And yonder shadows that come and go  
Across the quay where the bonfires glow,  
Are the merry-making folk."

But it is not a feast; it is for a much more grim and gruesome function that the fires are blazing on the quay of Leith. Twenty years before, the mate who with the skipper is watching the flickering flames and the black figures which pass and repass before them, has run away from his home and his widowed mother, drawn by the allurements of the adventurous life of the sea, and now he is returning to her who, he knows, has been waiting for him so wearily, perhaps so despairingly. He leaps on shore and eagerly speeds to the familiar cottage, but though there are lights on the shore there are

none in the little window. Still, his mother may be safely asleep in bed, but his eager knocking meets with no reply. The terrible thought of death overwhelms his spirit, though he does not, cannot guess the awful truth. A form draws near the darkness and reveals the haggard countenance of a kinswoman who slowly tells the piteous story. The superstitious pedant King James VI had landed at Leith trembling at the terrors of the sea, and convinced that the spells of witchcraft had raised the storm that had threatened his sacred person. When kings demanded witches there were plenty to find them, and among the three that were found was the lonely old woman.

“ They bade her tell she had wrought the spell  
That made the tempest blaw;  
They strippit her bare as a naked bairn,  
They tried her wi’ pincers and heated airn  
Till she shriek’d and swooned awa’!

“ O Robin, Robin, the King sat there,  
While the cruel deed was done,  
And the clergy o’ Christ ne’er bade him spare  
For the sake o’ God’s ain Son : . . .”

‘ The lights of Leith : the lights of Leith :  
Like Hell’s own lights they glow  
While the sailor stands with his trembling hands  
Prest hard on his heart in woe.

‘“O Robin, Robin . . . they doom’d her to *burn*  
 Down yonner upon the quay . . .  
 This night was the night . . . see the light, see the light :  
 How it burns by the side o’ the sea !”

The distraught man can hear no more : he  
 rushes madly towards the pyramids of flame  
 that redden the night.

‘What madman is he who leaps in where they gleam,  
 Close, close to the centremost form ?

“O mither, O mither :” he cries with a scream,  
 That rings through the heart of the storm.

‘He can see the white hair snowing down through the glare,  
 The white face upraised to the skies—  
 Then the cruel red blaze blots the thing from his gaze,  
 And he falls on his face—and dies.

‘The lights of Leith : the lights of Leith :  
 See, see they are flaming still :  
 Through the clouds of the past their flame is cast  
 While the Sabbath bells ring shrill.

‘The lights of Leith : the lights of Leith :  
 They’ll burn till the Judgment Day,  
 Till the Church’s curse and the monarch’s shame  
 And the sin that slew in the Blessed Name  
 Are burned and purged away !’

This is such powerful work that were any  
 critic to declare Mr Buchanan pre-eminently  
 a balladist it would be difficult to show effective  
 reasons for dissent from his verdict. If, how-  
 ever, I were to ask myself the question ‘What

has this poet done that no one else has done at all, or done quite so well, or done quite in the same way,—in short, what is the unique element in his work?' I should find its answer not in the longer narrative poems such as *White Rose and Red*, *Balder*, or his more recent allegorical volumes, not in such dramatic or semi-dramatic performances as *Political Mystics* and *Saint Abe*, not in his sonnets or miscellaneous lyrics, not even in his ballads; but partly in the *London Poems* and in other studies of the homely or terrible realities of the life of the poor, and partly in those remarkable contributions to the literature of poetic mysticism which are most adequately represented in *The Book of Orm, the Celt*.

In his choice of subjects for the majority of his *London Poems* it may be frankly admitted that Mr Buchanan did not take an entirely new departure from recognised poetic conventions. He followed the lead of Wordsworth, who in the earlier days of the century had 'sought the huts where poor men lie,' and had succeeded in idealising the most apparently unpromising material, not by ignoring or tampering with prosaic details, but by exhibiting them in front of a moral or emotional background suffused

with a light which transfigured and glorified them. It may, however, be noted that Wordsworth had an advantage over the later poet, inasmuch as his poems of the poor were, mainly, indeed almost exclusively, rural idylls. The lowliest life spent in the country, howsoever prosaic in itself, is lived in an atmosphere which is essentially and obviously poetic; and for the imaginative cultivator of cottage domesticities the ground is, as it were, prepared. The poet of lowly town life has no such preparatory assistance. He has to mould to his purpose material which is not merely non-poetic but apparently anti-poetic; he has to deal with a life that is not simply unlovely but squalidly vulgar; and it was in setting himself to this special task that Mr Buchanan won the honours of the successful pioneer. It is not, however, the writer's choice of theme but his victorious treatment of it which sets these poems in a place apart. Years before Mr Buchanan wrote the monologue of 'Nell,' in which the young mother who is not a wife pours out her agonised lamentations for the lover who is to die upon the scaffold, Thomas Hood had sung of the suicide of an 'unfortunate,' and by so singing had defied the old traditions of poetical respect-

ability. Still in the midst of the defiance there was a suggestion of compromise. Hood did not dare to be quite true to the actual, and the picture is accordingly painted with a delicately eclectic brush. Everyone knows that any presentment of such a subject as that treated in 'The Bridge of Sighs' in which there appears 'only the beautiful,' is not simply an idealisation but a distortion of reality; and while true idealisation may enhance the essential veracity of any work of art, this false idealisation must always detract from it. There are two errors into one of which those poets who deal with homely human themes are peculiarly liable to fall. The first is that of men who, like Hood, preserve the poetry by keeping back some of the truth; the second is that of a writer like Crabbe who lets us see all the truth, but is, as a rule, unable to show us the underlying poetry. There are few men who in delineating the wastes and morasses of the human landscape can give us both *Dichtung* and *Wahrheit*, but the name of one of the few is Robert Buchanan.

The poem entitled 'Liz' provides an interesting and striking example of this strenuous fidelity to the central truth of things. 'Liz' is a girl of the slums who has never seen a green

field or walked between the hedges of a rural lane; and standing out among the memories of the short and troubled life she is leaving behind her is the memory of one day when she stole away from the familiar street and knew for once what the country meant. It is an attractive theme that lends itself readily to handling that is at once graceful, sympathetic and not apparently untruthful. If we ask what emotion supplies the obvious key-note of such a sketch, the almost universal reply would be the girl's rapturous delight in the grass of the meadow, the flower by the wayside, the open undimmed sky. But Mr Buchanan will have none of it, and Liz feels no delight but only a strange homelessness—a dull wonder which is neither pleasant nor painful, but which seems further removed from pleasure than from pain.

'How swift the hours sped on !—and by and by  
 The sun grew red, big shadows filled the sky,  
 The air grew damp with dew.  
 And the dark night was coming down I knew.  
 Well, I was more afraid than ever then,  
 And felt that I should die in such a place—  
 So back to London town I turned my face,  
 And crept into the cheerful streets again;  
 And when I breathed the smoke and heard the roar,  
 Why, I was better, for in London here  
 My heart was busy, and I felt no fear.

I never saw the country any more,  
 And I have stayed in London well or ill—  
     I would not stay out yonder if I could,  
     For one feels dead, and all looks pure and good—  
 I could not bear a life so bright and still.'

'The cheerful streets,' 'in London here my heart was busy and I felt no fear,' 'I could not bear a life so bright and still'—what strokes of penetrating truthfulness are these! We feel that the poet of 'Nell' and 'Liz' has that catholicity and virility of imagination which subjects the 'shows of things' to the 'desires of the mind' not by the timorous handling of eclecticism, but by the vigorous grasp of the athlete who wrestles with things evil and ugly, and will not let them go until they whisper their secret of beauty.

It is not often that the work of a poet provides such a marked change of atmosphere as that of which we are conscious when we turn from the *London Poems* to *The Book of Orm, the Celt*. It is a passage from all hateful tangibilities of sense to all lovely phantoms of vision, from Seven Dials to the Seventh Heaven; and yet we know that between the two products of the one mind there can be no breach of personal continuity—that an ade-

quate synthesis would exhibit them in obvious and inevitable relations to their source. Nor, indeed, are these relations obscure or difficult of discernment. In the *London Poems* the most perplexing problems of human life are propounded in those concrete forms which show them in their very nakedness of perplexity. In the *Book of Orm* there is—not a solution of them: *that* were too much to expect; but an instinctive outgoing of the spirit in the only direction in which it feels that a solution may possibly be found. From the first ‘Song of the Veil,’ in which we read—

‘How God in the beginning drew  
Over her face the Veil of blue.’

We are led through the ‘Songs of Corruption’ with that strange weird ‘Dream of the World without Death,’ through the ‘Songs of Seeking,’ through the sections entitled ‘The Man and the Shadow,’ ‘The Lifting of the Veil,’ and that most fascinating series of poems ‘The Devil’s Mystics’ to that marvellous ‘Vision of the Man Accurst’ which is to all that has gone before it at once a climax and an interpretation. The veil has been drawn not merely before the arcana of the methods of nature, the mysteries of

life and death, but before the secret things of divine providence—before that most wonderful secret of all, the mystery of divine redemption by love. In this final vision we are again in the region of the concrete, for the man who is lifted by the wild wind and whirled away from the heavenly gate to the dark ice-bound shore of the underworld where he stands or stalks, shivering and despairing, crying only for

‘A face to look upon, a heart that beats,  
A hand to touch,—’

is, in all human essentials, a figure who might have filled the central place in one of the *London Poems*. It is only the conditions that are reversed. In the earlier book we are before the veil; in the later book we are behind it; and to the emancipated imagination of the poet are disclosed the living forces which work for salvation in that inner light which to the eye of sense is but darkness. Perhaps for most readers the best way of studying this volume of mystical utterances is to read the last poem first,—as in it the informing idea of the whole work is seen free from the symbolism which, though to certain races—and to certain minds of every race—the most natural mode of presenting a

spiritual conception, is to the average Englishman a hindrance rather than a help. If, however, this method be adopted, the significance of the book can hardly be missed even by the most matter-of-fact reader. It is a vindication of that higher optimism which does not content itself with a lazy repetition of the maxim 'whatever is, is right,' but only with an assured faith in a Being whose existence and activity provide a guarantee that the thing which *is* and which is recognised as *evil* must be doomed to ultimate destruction. This is the plea itself; and the force of its emotional logic lies in the fact that the apparent incredibility of this conception of a prevailing goodness is frankly admitted—is indeed insisted upon through all the poems which are informed with the symbolism of the veil; and that yet, notwithstanding this insistence the final impression is not one of dubitation but of assured faith.

This is not a critical estimate of Mr Buchanan's poetry, it is, to use Mr Pater's happy word, an 'appreciation' of those portions of it which one reader out of many has found of special worth and interest. Picturesqueness, passion, humour, and pathos, fecundity of imagination, felicity of fancy, and variety of

melody are all present in his verse, but it has seemed well to one admirer of it to lay final emphasis upon something which belongs less to its art than to its substance—the spiritual vision which discerns the divine in the human; which sees in the lost souls of Judas Iscariot, the nameless ‘man accurst,’ and Ratcliffe Meg of ‘Tiger Bay’—

‘A spark that grows in the dark;  
A spark that burns in the brain;  
Spite of the curse and the stain;  
Over the sea and the plain,  
And in street and lane.’

## HAWKER OF MORWENSTOW

(1892)

HAD this page been printed a quarter of a century ago and been glanced at curiously by, say, a thousand people, it is safe to conjecture that 999 of them would certainly have asked 'Who was Hawker?' and unless they were West countrymen, might possibly have added the further question, 'Where is Morwenstow?' During his life-time Robert Stephen Hawker might almost have been classed among the obscure: during the eighteen years which have elapsed since his death, the little group of lovers has grown into a crowd; and in the mind's eye of every member of it the fascinatingly picturesque figure of the poet-priest is always seen standing out vividly against the wild background of iron crags which give a frontier to his Cornish sea-board parish. For the man Hawker oblivion has so far scattered her poppies

in vain, and as long as he is remembered the place whose only fame is his will be familiar and beloved. He will always be Hawker of Morwenstow.

Like another interesting person who in death gained the recognition denied him in life—the late John Sterling—Hawker has had two biographers of greater contemporary note than himself. Mr Baring-Gould and Dr F. G. Lee have both given us a record of his ways and works, and each biography has its special points of interest; but as the latter deals mainly with Hawker the ecclesiastic the former presents by far the most vivid and realisable portrait. Robert Stephen Hawker was born at Stoke Damorel on the 3rd of December 1804 and was the son of Mr J. S. Hawker, a medical man practising in Plymouth who afterwards took orders, and became first curate, then vicar, of Stratton in Cornwall. The boy's paternal grandfather was the well-known Dr Hawker, incumbent of Charles Church, Plymouth, author of the once popular devotional work *Morning and Evening Portions*, and of the still popular hymn beginning, 'Lord, dismiss us with Thy blessing,' which is in many collections attributed to other authors, poor Dr Hawker being

thus robbed of what is now his sole title-deed to fame. The boy Robert had been committed to the educational care of his grandfather; and being, as ill-luck would have it, ignorant of the fact that the hymn was a tribal fetish and therefore *tabu*, had the audacity to inform the author that it was 'crude and flat,' and to produce a composition of his own on similar lines which he blandly declared to be an 'improved version.' Such a critic at the hearth was not to be tolerated by any Doctor of Divinity; and as the too daring boy contracted a habit of practical joking, of which his grandfather's feminine admirers were the victims, his sojourn at Plymouth was not prolonged. At home, however, he played tricks more fantastic than ever, and after a brief and brilliant career as a not unpopular village Ishmael was despatched to the Grammar School of Cheltenham where he studied fitfully, read voraciously, and wrote many quires of verse, the visible outcome of this last occupation being a little volume of poems entitled 'Tendrils, by Reuben.' The booklet was not remarkable in any way, and not even interesting save as another illustration of the fact that even in the work of unmistakably original poets imitativeness precedes individuality. From Cheltenham

Hawker passed to Pembroke College, Oxford, but he had been in residence only a year when his father, now a poor curate, had to tell his son that for want of means his university career must come to an end. The young man, however, determined that the means should be forthcoming ; and he had recourse to an expedient so original in conception that no novelist careful of his reputation for verisimilitude would dare to make artistic use of it. Some few miles from Stratton lived the four Misses I'ans who had jointly inherited a fair estate and who possessed also separate incomes of £200 apiece. One of these ladies, Miss Charlotte I'ans, was at this time forty-one years of age, or one year older than Hawker's mother—she had been his godmother and had taught him his letters, and as soon as the young student learned his father's decision he resolved that this mature lady should become his wife. With characteristic impetuosity he did not wait to think twice ; he did not wait even to put on his hat ; but ran bareheaded from Stratton to Bude ; reached his destination hot and blown, and made his astounding proposal. Almost stranger than the offer itself was its instantaneous acceptance. 'The heart of Miss I'ans,' writes Mr Baring-

Gould, 'was taken by storm'; in November 1824 when Hawker was twenty years of age, the curiously assorted pair were married; and till parted by death many years afterwards lived a life of idyllic happiness and unfailing mutual love and devotion. The young husband now pursued his studies at Magdalen Hall, taking care at the same time to preserve mental flexibility by sportive recreations like unto those by which he had won fame in boyhood. Memorable among these was his triumphant appeal to the superstitious credulity of the simple-minded natives of Bude where he and his wife spent the long vacation. On a moonlight night of the July of 1825 or 1826 he swam or rowed out to a rock at some little distance from the shore, adorned himself with a flowing wig of seaweed, enveloped his naked legs in an oilskin wrapper, and sitting on the rock in this imperfect but æsthetic costume flashed the moonbeams about from a hand mirror, and sang aloud until he had attracted the attention of some passers-by who ran into Bude declaring themselves the discoverers of a genuine mermaid. They quickly returned with other lovers of the marvellous, and for several nights the mermaid, like Manoah's angel, 'did wondrously,' each succes-

sive performance being witnessed by a larger crowd of awe-struck spectators; but the night air even in July was chill, the singer became hoarse with his efforts, and so one evening he concluded the entertainment with a sturdy rendering of 'God save the King,' dived into the waves and reappeared no more.

Feats of this kind seem odd preparations for the priestly life, but one gets the idea that Hawker was one of those who lived both on the surface and at the centre—who could, to use Matthew Arnold's phrase be 'gay without frivolity.' Already had been lighted a fire of enthusiasm for what he believed to be his divine vocation, and though nothing is to be learned of the inner life of these 'prentice days, we know that they must have been days of seed-sowing and germination in the darkness, preparatory to the harvest which was to be gathered in the light. Hawker duly took his degree, having gained the Newdegate prize for his poem on 'Pompeii'—probably, one would think, a congenial theme—was ordained deacon in 1829 and priest two years afterwards. He was appointed to a curacy at North Tamerton where he remained until 1834, when he accepted from Bishop Philpotts of Exeter, the small living of

Morwenstow; and here in this out-of-the-world parish he was destined to remain during the forty years which lay before him, and to live a life of arduous service, which in itself and in its picturesque surroundings makes an appeal to the emotions and the imagination not less impressive than that made by the life of many a mediæval saint.

Morwenstow—the Stow or station of the Cornish Saint Morwenna—hides itself among the cliffs of one of the wildest portions of the wild coast of Cornwall. A long line of curiously contorted crags stretches northward to the point of Hartland, and south-westward to far Tintagel, whose cliff stands out black against the crimson and amber of sunset. The visitor—a more common object of the country now than he was sixty years ago—approaches the little village by a lonely road, which passes for miles between scanty hedgerows with never a tree to break the monotony. As it nears the sea the road suddenly dips, and the stranger catches his first glimpse of the pinnacled tower of the grey church of Morwenstow with, below it in the glen, the roof and quaint chimneys of the vicarage; and behind these the horizon line which on bright summer days divides the blue

of wide-spread waters from the blue of windless skies. On such days the quiet little spot, 'far from noise and smoke of town,' seems a veritable 'home of ancient peace,' and yet, as has been said by one who knew it well, 'no one can wander along the summit of the cliffs without a consciousness that he is looking upon a giant, at rest indeed for a time, but more full of strength and more really terrible than any of the Cormorans or the Goemagots, who left their footprints and their strongholds on the hills of Cornwall.' All along the pitiless coast are little village churchyards, under whose turf rests many a victim of wave and crag; and in that of Morwenstow, the crews of scores of doomed vessels were laid to rest by the vicar who read the words of Christian hope in the ears of the little band which he had trained to go out as searchers for the storm-slain mariners.

The dwellers in this region had been for generations as tameless as the billows which broke upon their cliffs, fearing not God nor regarding man; unscrupulous smugglers; ruthless wreckers; Ishmaels of the shore and sea. For years before Hawker's appearance the moral darkness had been unbroken even by the one beacon which had been raised to bear witness to

the light—the grey sanctuary which the disciples of Morwenna had built for God beside the Severn Sea. For more than a century there had not been a resident vicar, and the last dweller at the vicarage had been more apt to grow merry over his port than earnest in his labours, leaving behind him as the sole relic of his works and days a gigantic lantern ingeniously constructed of fragments of wine-glasses, broken when the mirth grew fast and furious—a strange *memento mori*, which came into the hands of Hawker, and was by him transferred to the original constructor and owner. During the years, not of this wine-bibbing curate alone but of many predecessors, there had been an unhallowed unity of taste between parson and people, and Hawker found that he had entered into a heritage of worse than heathen tradition. It was impossible that he should capitulate to the parish *Zeit Geist*, and it seemed little less than impossible victoriously to withstand it. In a fashion that was symptomatic of the man's whole nature, of his high aspirations, his quaint originality of utterance, and his ineradicable tendency to raise the most prosaic facts of life into an ideal region Hawker struck a keynote which dominated the music of the years which

were to come. The annual value of the living of Morwenstow was exactly £365, and to the imagination of the new vicar the identity of the number of pounds with the number of the days in the year brought his stipend into an associative alliance with the divine procession of hours and seasons, and thus conferred upon it a dower of ethical impressiveness. The £365, paid probably in irredeemably commonplace instalments, acquired a true mystical value, and over the porch of the vicarage, Hawker inscribed the lines :—

‘A house, a glebe, a pound a day,  
A pleasant place to watch and pray :  
Be true to church, be kind to poor,  
O minister ! for evermore.’

The lines were a prophecy which was nobly fulfilled,—a prelude to long years of watching and praying, of fidelity to the writer’s ideal of a Christian Church, of unremitting service to the poor among whom his lot was cast, and to the stranger hurled by stress of storm upon the rugged Cornish shore. The history of the transformation of the Morwenstow wreckers into the Morwenstow rescuers with its stirring incidents of deadly peril and dauntless courage, may be read in Mr Baring-Gould’s picturesque pages.

Of one set of the incidents of storm—incidents not of Christian aid given to the living but of Christian honour done to the dead—we have commemorations written by Hawker himself in prose and verse which can hardly be left unnoted. There is, for example, the story of the wreck of the ‘Caledonia,’ told partly by its sole survivor and partly by his six weeks’ host—too long to be told again here, but made permanently interesting by the one relic of the event which remains to this day in the little churchyard, and which provides a theme for one of Hawker’s tenderest and at the same time state-liest lyrical utterances. In his prose narrative the vicar of Morwenstow simply says, ‘We placed at the foot of the captain’s grave the figurehead of his vessel. It is a carved image life-size, of his native Caledonia, in the garb of her country, with shield and sword.’ In the not less simple poem he rose to that solemn, measured music which was the natural language of his impassioned moods.

‘We laid them in their lowly rest,  
The strangers of a distant shore,  
We smoothed the green turf on their breast,  
’Mid baffled ocean’s angry roar;  
And there, the relique of the storm,  
We fixed fair Scotland’s figured form.

'She watches by her bold, her brave,  
Her shield towards the fatal sea :  
Their cherished lady of the wave  
Is guardian of their memory.  
Stern is her look, but calm, for there  
No gale can rend or billow bear.

'Stand, silent image ! stately stand,  
Where sighs shall breathe and tears be shed  
And many a heart of Cornish land  
Will soften for the stranger dead.  
They came in paths of storm; they found  
This quiet home in Christian ground.'

In one respect Hawker and his wild parishioners had much in common, for his intense religiousness of nature, his eager imagination, and his quick response to every appeal from the world of marvel, impelled him not only to sympathise with, but to share, many of the superstitions, so called, of the simple Cornish folk. He believed in the evil eye, which he professed himself able to recognise by certain indications, and whenever he met the gaze of a person in whom such indications were present, he would hold his thumb and first two fingers in a peculiar manner to avert from himself the malign influence. To the familiar arguments, the statement of which involves emphatic references to 'the enlightened nineteenth century' Hawker had always the one reply that he did not 'pretend to be wiser than

the Word of God,' in which he found that the evil eye (St Mark vii. 21) is named with 'blasphemy, pride, and foolishness' as one of the things that defile a man. The fact being thus attested by the highest authority, rational explanation was really needless, but Hawker accepted, nevertheless, the theory of Heliodorus, Bishop of Tricca in Thessaly, that all men are surrounded by an atmosphere impalpable to the senses, which is a conductor of spiritual influences just as water is a conductor of sound and iron of electricity, and through which a good or evil nature may make itself beneficently or malevolently influential. As a matter of course, the reality of witchcraft was among the numerous articles in his miscellaneous creed, and there was an old woman in Morwenstow of whose unhallowed powers he believed he had ocular demonstration. 'I have seen,' he used to say, with an unmistakable accent of conviction, 'the five black spots placed under her tongue which are indications of what she is. They are like those in the feet of swine, made by the entrance into them of the demons of Gadara.' The result might be entertaining if some vivacious young man of letters, defying chronology, would give us a Landorian imagin-

ary conversation between the Rev. R. S. Hawker and Professor Huxley on the subject of the Gadarene miracle.

In the foregoing pages the word 'picturesque' has been more than once employed as a descriptive epithet, and it has been used deliberately, for Hawker's whole personality was strikingly pictorial. Physically, he represented a specially fine and striking type of manhood, for he was tall, broad, and well-built, with nobly modelled features, eyes that were full and dark, and, in his later years, long, snowy hair. His habitual garb rendered him a still more noticeable figure. When he went to Morwenstow he wore his cassock, but it did not lend itself to climbing about the cliffs, and he abandoned it for a claret coloured coat with long tails, under which was displayed a fisherman's blue jersey, with a small cross knitted into the side at the place where his Master's body had been pierced by the Roman soldier's spear. The massive head was surmounted by a brimless hat, like that of a Greek archimandrite, of pink or flesh-coloured beaver; and the orthodox clerical black—the one colour which he detested and would not wear even at a funeral—was represented in his cos-

tume only by the great fishing-boots which reached above his knee.

The England of our time can have seen few odder figures than that of the vicar of Morwenstow, and perhaps had his lot been cast among a more conventional community than that to which he ministered, the man of many colours and strange ways might hardly have escaped the suspicion of mental aberration. As a matter of fact he did not altogether escape, but the rumours of madness perished of inanition as they neared Morwenstow, for no one could come into actual contact with Hawker and fail to recognise in him that combination of simplicity and shrewdness which is always an unerring note of assured sanity. The theory sometimes advanced that animals and children attach themselves only to 'good' people is, it must be feared, merely a pleasant fancy; but it seems true that these instinctive, half-developed intelligences always feel the charm of general healthfulness of nature, and with Hawker they were always at home. In his relations with the creatures of fur and feathers he reminds us of one with whom he had probably more in common than appears upon the surface—the gentle St Francis of

Assisi. When we read some of the stories of apparently miraculous instances of divine vengeance which Hawker was rather fond of telling he seems a ferocious, almost blood-thirsty, person; and it is good and pleasant to have those mental pictures of the big, quaintly attired man standing in the midst of the wild birds of Morwenstow which fluttered around the friend who loved and fed them, or walking up the chancel on Sunday or Saint's Day, followed by his nine cats which were duly scratched under their chins at intervals during the service, or sauntering along the Morwenstow lanes with a retinue of delighted children who joyously put their little hands in his and waited for the story of Arthurian knight or Cornish saint which was sure to be forthcoming.

Some one has remarked of Dante Rossetti that he was a man of the mediæval centuries born out of due time; but the description applies much more closely to the Cornish parson than to the Chelsea painter. He believed firmly that the stars which led the wise men to the manger at Bethlehem had travelled southward, to gleam until that day when the heavens shall be wrapt together as a scroll, in the constellation of the Southern Cross. He loved birds for their own

sake, but also because they reminded him of angels—*Ubi aves, ibi angeli* was a saying of his—and when he wanted rooks to settle in his grove he knelt before the altar to pray for them, and of course took it as the most natural thing in the world when the rooks came. When an attempt was made to deprive the church of Morwenstow of the adjacent well of St John, which to Hawker was a veritable saintly heir-loom, he composed a solemn form of supplication which was offered thrice a day in the sanctuary while the case was being tried ; and when success was won or, as Hawker would have said, given, his pious rapture in what he regarded as the triumph of God's Church over the hosts of the ungodly found utterance in one of the finest of his few but memorable sonnet utterances.

‘ They dreamed not in old Hebron, when the sound  
Went through the city that the promised son  
Was born to Zachary, and his name was John—  
They little thought that here, in this far ground  
Beside the Severn Sea, that Hebrew child  
Would be a cherished memory of the wild !  
Here, where the pulses of the ocean bound  
Whole centuries away, while one meek cell  
Built by the fathers o’er a lonely well,  
Still breathes the Baptist’s sweet remembrance round.  
A spring of silent waters with his name,  
That from the angel’s voice in music came,

Here in the wilderness so faithful found  
It freshens to this day the Levite's grassy mound.'

In the beginning of 1863 the wife whom Hawker had wooed and won in such impetuous erratic fashion was taken from him, and in December 1864, unable to bear the oppression of the strange loneliness, he married Pauline, daughter of Count Kuczynski, a Polish exile who had held an appointment in England. Three little daughters, to whom he gave the names of Morwenna, Rosalind, and Juliet were now born to him, and thus, in the Indian summer of his life the hitherto childless child-lover knew the joys of fatherhood. As age grew upon him, anxieties of various kinds increased, and the long-vigorous frame began to show signs of weakness. The New Year of 1875 found him much changed, and in June it became evident that he must have a time of absolute rest. He decided to visit Plymouth, where on Monday, the 9th of August, he was suddenly struck down by paralysis. On the succeeding Saturday, Mrs Hawker, a devoted Roman Catholic, suggested that Canon Mansfield, a local ecclesiastic of her Church should be summoned to see him. He was now speechless, but the expression of his countenance

was taken as acquiescent ; at ten o'clock the fitfully conscious man was received into the Roman Church ; and the next morning he passed away.

It was a flat and uncharacteristic ending to a rich and vigorous life ; but true stories are wont to lack that climax of harmonious *dénouement* which leaves behind it a pleasant sense of satisfaction and fulfilment. The somewhat heated controversy which succeeded the event need not be revived. It was, of course, asserted of Hawker, as it had been of a more illustrious convert, that while officiating as an apparently devoted minister of the English Church, he had been for years 'a Romanist at heart' ; and there was just as much external plausibility and intrinsic falsehood in the libel upon Robert Stephen Hawker as in that upon John Henry Newman. To a man who went out with special eagerness to any great venture or forlorn hope of faith ; who was in the land of marvel native and to the manner born ; and to whom the universe was one great gallery of spiritual symbolism, there may—nay, there must—have been a fell fascination in the scholastic theology, the legendary record, the elaborate sacramental system of the Church whose

voice for eighteen centuries had sounded from the seven hills of Rome; but no one who knew him in the flesh or who has read his story with the apprehension of a fine sympathy, will be visited by even a passing doubt of the loyalty of the single-eyed, brave-hearted vicar of Morwenstow.

Even now it can hardly be said that Hawker is well known, but he is better known as a poet than as a personality; and yet his poetry is so informed by his personality that the former can hardly be fully appreciated in the absence of some knowledge of the latter. Stress must of course be laid upon the word 'fully,' for to say that appreciation of any artistic product, be it poem, or essay, or picture, depends wholly upon our knowledge of its producer is to declare it lacking of all value that is not purely biographical. There are, however, various noble works of art—the essays of Elia, the novels of Charlotte Brontë, and the pictures of Jean François Millet may serve as examples—the intrinsic interest or charm of which is indefinitely intensified by the personal element in their conception or handling, and to this small but particularly fascinating class of work, Hawker's verse certainly belongs.

The most striking of its purely literary qualities are simplicity and inartificiality, and it is necessary to use both words, because of late we have been so often asked to admire a simplicity, which is altogether a thing of artifice, which has no spontaneity, and which is the result of a deliberate striving after an effect that has struck certain literary artists as likely to be a pleasing novelty, in an age of complex feeling and elaborated expression. Hawker had a style—that is, he had a mode of expression which was the natural outcome of an opulent and strongly individualised nature; but the relation between his verse and the impassioned thought which it utters is so vital and organic, so entirely a relation of necessity rather than of choice, that the hateful word ‘stylist’ can never be used concerning him by any sane critic. Thus he was, as might have been expected, especially at home in the ballad and in the pure lyric, the two poetical forms to the perfection of which this spontaneous simplicity and directness are most absolutely essential—in which self-conscious elaboration is not merely nothing, but less than nothing, a minus quantity. It was not wonderful, therefore, that his ‘Song of the Western Men,’ should be accepted and quoted

by such judges as Lord Macaulay and Charles Dickens as a genuine antique, a relic of one of those unknown country balladists whose innocence of the sophistications of mere literary culture enabled them to render their imaginative vision with a force and swiftness after which the poet in an age of more highly organised sensibilities and aptitudes strives in vain. The same qualities appear in all his most characteristic poems,—in the sweet *naïveté* of ‘Modryb Marya;’ in the sombre impressiveness of ‘The Silent Tower of Bottreau;’ in the lilting music of ‘Queen Gwennivar’s Round,’ with its haunting refrain,

‘Naiad for Grecian waters,  
Nymph for the mountain side,  
But old Cornwall’s bounding daughters  
For grey Dundagel’s tide;’

in the simple natural pathos of the dirge ‘Sing from the chamber to the grave.’ Of this poem Hawker tells us that its first line ‘haunted the memory and the lips of a blameless young farmer who died in my parish some years ago. It was, as I conceive, a fragment of some forgotten dirge of which he could remember no more. But it was his strong desire that “the words” should be “put upon his headstone,” and

he wished me also to write "some other words to make it complete." I fulfilled his entreaty, and the stranger who visits my churchyard will find this dirge carved in stone, "in sweet remembrance of the just," and to the praise of the dead, Richard Cann.'

' "Sing from the chamber to the grave!"

Thus did the dead man say:

"A sound of melody I crave

Upon my burial day.

' "Bring forth some tuneful instrument,

And let your voices rise:

My spirit listened, as it went,

To music of the skies.

' "Sing sweetly while you travel on,

And keep the funeral slow:—

The angels sing where I am gone,

And you should sing below.

' "Sing from the threshold to the porch,

Until you hear the bell;

And sing you loudly in the church

The Psalms I love so well.

' "Then bear me gently to my grave,

And as you pass along,

Remember 'twas my wish to have

A pleasant funeral song.

' "So earth to earth, and dust to dust!

And though my flesh decay

My soul shall sing among the just

Until the judgment day."

The truth is that Hawker was, within his own range, the typical poet, described by Theseus as of imagination all compact; and throughout his life the simplest facts or incidents were seen by him surrounded by a halo of transfiguring thought and association. A curious example of this idealising instinct is to be found in a poem in which with his wonted fervour he does homage to his diocesan, the celebrated 'Henry of Exeter.' The poet is not in the least oppressed by the thought of the petty wrangling and interminable litigation in which that remarkable prelate spent so large a portion of his life; he seizes at once upon the one poetical aspect of the curious career; goes in imagination to the council chamber of the peers of England; listens to his spiritual fathers pleading the cause of the Church against a stiff-necked and gainsaying generation; and thus concludes an apostrophe to the little church of Morwenstow in which the Bishop has just been ministering.

' Fane of the woods, farewell ! a holier thought  
Henceforth be thine with added beauty blest !  
The presence of this day hath surely wrought  
A charm immortal for thy home of rest.  
Long may the swallow find her wonted nest

On thy grey walls : long may the breezes bear  
The sounds of worship from thy happy breast !  
The mind that shook whole Senates hath been there;  
Strong be the soul of faith, and firm the voice of prayer.'

It is hardly necessary to add that though Hawker was quick to discern the one poetic side of a prosaic subject which a thousand men would have missed, he was naturally drawn towards themes, the poetical suggestiveness of which was obvious and unmistakable. In Cornish legendary lore, and especially in that portion of it which dealt with Christian history, or could be made subservient to a mystical Christian use, was a poetic treasure which had been, as it were, 'hid in a field,' waiting for a finder who would know how to prize and use it. Hawker had a claim to the treasure that lay deeper than mere taste. His numerous ballads and poems of various kinds, suggested by local ecclesiastical and other legends, derive much of their peculiar charm from the implicit and child-like faith by which they are evidently inspired. He writes, as the early Christian painters worked, not as a mere artist engaged in the decorative treatment of graceful fictions, but as a believer anxious to

exhibit and celebrate the beauty of divine and indubitable fact.

One of his poems, a fragment containing some of his finest work, has for its title *The Quest of the Sangraal*, and it is interesting to notice how Hawker's treatment of the theme differs from that of Lord Tennyson. The latter regards the quest as a mystical representation of the morbid excitement which is one of the symptoms of spiritual decay, and accordingly the king, who symbolises the perfect sanity of the soul cannot but regard it with sad foreboding; while to the former it is a real and grand culmination of spiritual vitality, and 'Arthur, the son of Uter and the Night,' is the first to raise the cry,—

'Ho : for the Sangraal vanished vase of God.'

Even had *The Quest* been completed it would certainly have possessed less of artistic finish than the Laureate's *Holy Grail*, but, mere fragment as it is, it is infinitely richer in that fervour of feeling only generated by impassioned vision of a vividly apprehended reality. And this is a typical specimen of Hawker's work in the field of legend. Any story which satisfied his imagination and harmonised with his faith carried its own evidence with it, and stood in no

need of the gross external proof demanded by an age which knows more of historic criticism than of 'the witness of the Spirit.' Matthew Arnold, in many a musical wail has complained that we cannot sing such songs as were sung of old because we have lost the beliefs which possessed the older singers. Robert Stephen Hawker certainly did not labour under this disqualification. His was the hunger and thirst for the unknown and illimitable which inspired Tertullian's celebrated *certum quia impossibile est*,—a saying which one feels must have been as spiritually fascinating to Hawker as it was intellectually attractive to Sir Thomas Browne.

In the border region—the region in which the things of sense still remain, but are seen through a luminous mist of spiritual symbolism and association—Hawker was peculiarly at home. He never went on a deliberate search after hidden meanings or morals as do the mechanically-minded mystics, to whom every object in nature and in religious art is an arbitrary hieroglyph, with no fluidity of significance or multiplicity of suggestion. His mind worked instinctively; he felt before he saw; and indicated with the indescribable truth of emotion rather than with the outlined pre-

cision of thought, the unseen spiritual vesture with which things seen are clothed, and by which they are glorified. There is no more characteristic illustration of this special sensibility and activity than the sonnet entitled 'The Vine,' the theme of which was supplied by what was to him a never-failing source of suggestion, the church of his forty years' ministry.

'Hearken : There is in old Morwenna's shrine,  
A lonely sanctuary of the Saxon days,  
Reared by the Severn sea for prayer and praise,  
Amid the carved work of the roof, a vine.  
Its root is where the eastern sunbeams fall  
First in the chancel, then along the wall  
Slowly it travels on, a leafy line,  
With here and there a cluster, and anon  
More and more grapes, until the growth hath gone  
Through arch and aisle. Hearken : and heed the sign.  
See at the altar side the steadfast root :  
Mark well the branches, count the summer fruit :  
So let a meek and faithful heart be thine,  
And gather from that tree a parable divine.'

The kind of work represented here must be enjoyed for its beauty, tenderness, and spiritual fervour ; but it is often somewhat lacking in healthy virility, and it is therefore specially needful to emphasise the statement that Hawker was an essentially *manly* poet. His sympathy

with the ascetic life, and a cloistral tendency of imagination which, if not inborn, became at an early age habitual, never dulled the quickness of his feeling for the simpler human emotions to which, in so many of his poems he has given beautiful and adequate expression, without ever laying himself open to the charge often, and not always unjustly, brought against Wordsworth of having suffered the prosaic accidents of his subjects to overpower—so far, at least, as immediate impression was concerned—their really poetic essentials. Nor did his mystical pre-posessions ever blunt his enjoyment of the merely sensuous side of Nature; and the pleasure he derived from the sonorous break of a mighty wave upon an opposing cliff, the strong flight of a solitary sea-fowl, or the rustling of a mountain stream through a narrow valley to the sea, had as much of the flesh and blood quality which belongs to the enjoyment of the typical sportsman, as of the more contemplative delight which is the possession of a poet with an eye for the things ‘behind this show.’

It is, indeed, not unfitting that the force which inevitably belongs to any last word should be given to the expression of a conviction that half, or more than half, of the charm

of Hawker's verse is to be found in its rich humanity. It is verse through which warm blood circulates, in which a strong pulse beats—verse which moves us as we are moved by a human voice of tenderness in time of sorrow, by the ringing accent of courage in time of fear. There have been finer lyrics than 'Queen Gwennivar's Round,' finer sonnets than 'Pater vester pascit illa,' finer ballads—though not many of them—than 'The Silent Tower of Bottreau'; but there are few poems of any rank which find a way home to us more immediately than they.

THE END









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